

Social Planning in Israel

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"Planning is the introduction of order and system. It is the conscious and deliberate guidance of thinking directed towards creating and identifying the logical means for reaching agreed-on ends. It is a basic approach to human problems. It is a point of view and an attitude which says that we can anticipate, guide and control our affairs. Social planning is in fundamental harmony with Jewish tradition."

Introduction

SOCIAL planning in Israel is everywhere — and nowhere. This is the major conclusion which emerges from six months of intensive review, accomplished by interviewing, observing and reading.

The study was undertaken from July 1 to December 31, 1975 at the invitation of the Szold Institute¹ which is interested in making a more effective contribution in the area of social planning. Interviews — well over 100 — were conducted at five Israeli universities, eight different research institutes, seven different government ministries, the Jewish Agency, Youth Aliyah, and the Joint Distribution Committee. In addition, a number of other Israelis in various walks of life shared their reactions and ideas. Work of social organizations was observed in several instances. Books and articles pertaining to social planning in Israel were reviewed along with publications of the Szold Institute and of other research institutes.²

¹ Founded in 1941, the Szold Institute is an independent, non-profit research organization based in Jerusalem. It does research on a contract basis, primarily for government. Hadassah, the Jewish Agency and the Israel Ministry of Education contribute to the support of the Institute.

² The openness and cooperation of all those I met were most salutary and made my work possible. The staff of the Szold Institute, especially the Director, the Administrator and the librarians

Efforts were made to ascertain what is happening in Israel with respect to social planning, what are the needs and the mechanisms, what are the attitudes, who is involved and what is the potential of the Szold Institute for more constructive work in this field. More specifically, there was a focus on the utilization of social planners and social science research by decision-makers, especially in government.

The field of interest was narrowed at the outset by exclusion of what might be best described as community planning. This is a process through which members of a community consciously seek to determine, establish and sustain those conditions, services, programs and facilities which will ensure the good life for all members of the community. It is a participatory process through which a community identifies its needs and organizes itself so as to fulfill those needs. In general, this community planning process is absent in Israel which has a highly centralized, politicized bureaucracy that is not especially responsive to pressures from the citizenry. The bureaucracy has a good deal of policy-making power as well as discretionary administrative power. As a consequence of this finding at the beginning of the study, it was decided to eliminate con-

were particularly helpful. I am most grateful to all those who facilitated my work.

sideration of "community planning" and to concentrate rather on how social scientists influence social policy formulators and decision-makers.

Background

In order to achieve some perspective on the situation in Israel with respect to social planning, it may be useful to look first at some general considerations.

Prior to World War II, there was little impact on policy-makers and decision-makers by social planners, social scientists and social researchers. During World War II, in America and in Britain, social scientists were widely used and greatly respected. Their contributions ranged from selection and classification of military manpower to training, to operations research, to intelligence work, to the decision not to depose the Japanese emperor. Their success gave rise to the great expectation that, in peace time, social scientists would solve all of society's social problems — poverty, race prejudice, urban decay, illiteracy, crime, etc.

This unreal and naive expectation — furthered by overly-confident and overly-optimistic social scientists — has given way to disillusion. Formal social science research has not produced social innovations. Government officials both in Britain and the United States manifest general good will for social science research but are able to cite few instances of actual use of such research in planning and in decision-making. Sometimes, they deliberately decide not to use research findings because the evidence is frequently suspect and usually ignores political feasibility. The contribution of social research to social policy has, unfortunately, been oversold.

In Britain, there are some 1100 social research organizations, more than half of them within universities. A majority of their research projects are designed to influence the formulation of social

policy. In general, it would appear that they are not successful. Exaggerated promises have not been fulfilled. The research is often seen by the government official as little more than an academic exercise which is trivial, abstract and sadly misleading.

This state of affairs might be anticipated since there is a built-in conflict between the research planner and the political decision-maker. If one strips down to its bare essentials the approach of the social planner, it includes the following six steps:

1. Determine objectives with such precision as to permit them to become performance measures.
2. Identify all possible paths to attain the specified objectives.
3. Calculate the cost and the benefit of travelling along each path to the objective, including the lost opportunity costs.
4. Select the optimal path to the objective.
5. Monitor the implementation of the choice, using feedback to make corrections in the path selected.
6. Evaluate the results in terms of performance measures.

The heart of this approach is to choose from among an array of alternatives that one which is best. By contrast, the political decision-maker wishes to avoid clear-cut choices. He wants to have his cake and to eat it too. This is best expressed in the essential element of political promises by office-seekers in America. After one cuts away the rhetoric, the political platform is revealed as offering more services and lower taxes, a patently impossible achievement. This kind of promise has led to caricaturing the American political candidate as a person whose feet are planted firmly in mid-air.

The political decision-maker or governmental official has further difficul-

ties in working with social planners. He knows that conflicting values often confound him as he confronts hard choices. It is practically unheard of for the decision-maker to be able to state with specificity "this is precisely what I want to achieve; these are my constraints; these are my resources; these are my alternatives; therefore, I must do A — B — C." At the same time, it is most unusual for the social scientist to be in a position immediately to call on available knowledge or to produce knowledge quickly which will provide clear directives as to what steps should be taken. Rarely is social science knowledge instantly translatable into a prescription for action. Consequently, the decision-maker must take action in a state of ignorance or, at best, in a state of incomplete knowledge. He wants the planner to provide knowledge, analyses and recommendations which are politically sensitive, not rhetoric. He has to cope with problems when he has inadequate information, insufficient perspective and vague objectives. He knows that, in the final analysis, selecting the right course of action is always a matter of choice and never a matter of fact. He must act on the basis of whatever knowledge he can obtain readily and, on the basis of his own beliefs and values, attempt to fuse knowledge and ideology in a political, technical and val- uational mosaic.

Policy-makers vary in the amount and in the quality of information which is available to them. Too much information clogs the system and paralyzes the policy-maker, especially if he attempts to examine every possible choice and the consequences of each. There is a point of diminishing returns. Vast quantity of information is sometimes simply a function of the vested interest of the social scientist who keeps recommending additional studies to obtain more information since his aim is to

understand the world, by contrast with the policy-maker who wants to change the world.

However, in general, the problem for the policy-maker is not too much information but insufficient information and unreliable information. There are several difficult problems associated with producing enough reliable information in order to help the policy-makers choose intelligently from among the available options:

1. The social scientist may simply be unable to provide the information which is needed. His tools may be inadequate. If he relies on already available information derived from previous studies, he often finds that the information is ambiguous and contradictory. Its reliability is sometimes dubious since statistics are frequently suspect. Indeed, data are occasionally little more than science fiction.
2. Social science research takes time. The policy-maker has to act in the present; usually he has to act before the research findings are available. The leisurely pace of much social science research often makes it useless since policy-decisions and political actions must be taken.
3. Social science research is costly. This poses the issue as to whether the financial resources — always limited — should be used for research or for services. Would it be better to finance studies of health care needs or to build hospitals?
4. All policy-decisions require assumptions about the future. Social scientists cannot produce data for the future; they can only offer probabilistic hypotheses. Their explications of alternative futures are sometimes little more than sham options.

These inherent difficulties suggest that policy-makers generally must make

decisions in a state of ignorance — or possibly in a state where information may be available but may be unreliable. They require creative artistry as they consider crucial factors which cannot be expressed precisely and which can often only be grasped intuitively.

These limitations form part of the framework within which one may examine social planning in Israel.

Attitudes Toward Social Planning in Israel

When the State was founded, there was a distinctly negative, even hostile, attitude toward planning. This attitude persists in many quarters today; in others, it has yielded to a stance of reserved skepticism.

In earlier times, there was considerable pride in the fact that Israel was a nation of quick decision and instant action. There was a highly pragmatic orientation to the immediate present. This was tested and reinforced by repeated success in rapidly solving problems through improvisation and intuition. The prevailing point of view was that action precedes analysis; action does not proceed from analysis. Officials who made decisions promptly and who took action decisively were affectionately and respectfully known as *bitzuistim*, men of action. Their decisions were usually hasty, often haphazard and essentially non-rational. They were supported by the country's strong ideological orientation which gave rise to considerable hesitation and doubt about the value of a scientific approach to human and social problems. Beliefs and commitments were seen as sufficient determinants of behavior; hard evidence was neither sought nor valued.

At that earlier time, it was considered wasteful to plan and to analyze. It was a time to do, to build, to move, to act. Many Israelis now look back with fond nostalgia to that period. They acknowl-

edge the possibility that mistakes may have been made for lack of planning. But they hold that "we got results, we produced, acted, and that's what counts."

Those who maintain this attitude believe that planning postpones action. They satirize the present scene as follows: "We plan, we analyze, we study, we think, we examine, we take years to design a toilet, let alone to do something important. We have experts who debate and discuss; they are like Nero who fiddled while Rome burned. We need *bitzuistim!*"

The negative predisposition to planning is furthered by the feeling that emphasis must be placed on the present. The future is too uncertain and too fraught with possible developments over which Israelis can exercise no control, such as Arab attacks, American support and the volume of immigration. Concomitantly, there are those who hold that it is inappropriate to be concerned with social planning and social problems; all energies must go into coping with the far more important priorities of security and the economy.

Finally, those who are opposed to planning and who deride it, point to Jewish tradition as support for their negative attitude. In Judaism, value attaches to taking action here and now in this world rather than in some ill-defined world to come. Moral acts rather than theological speculation were the traditional preoccupation of Judaism. Jews believe that the deed is more important than the creed.

Despite all these contrary views which still may be found today in one form or another, there is some evidence that there now appears to be emerging an attitude which holds that regardless of all the uncertainties, Israel has no option. It must engage in social planning. There is growing recognition that the country's intractable social problems re-

quire thoughtful and rational analysis with both short- and long-term planning being seen increasingly as essential for solution. Israel's social problems require corrective and constructive response. Improvisation and action before analysis have produced insufficient progress in tackling the country's major social problems such as poverty, immigrant absorption, education and the chasm between the Oriental and Occidental segments of Israeli society. Although some headway has certainly been made in dealing with these issues, much work remains to be done and many people contend that this work can be done more effectively if there were careful planning.

Those who are favorable to social planning take comfort from the existence of many research institutes, as well as research and planning units in most government ministries. They offer this as evidence of greater interest in and receptivity to social planning.

The simultaneous existence of both positive and negative attitudes toward social planning may be seen as something of a paradox until one reminds oneself of the special Jewish capacity to grasp both horns of a dilemma at the same time. This ability to incorporate polar opposites concurrently has been of help to Jews in the past and holds out hope for the future with respect to social planning.

Findings

Social planning, in the form of efforts to utilize research in social policy decisions, is widely diffused throughout Israel. Most government ministries have research and planning units which vary considerably in their competence, their resources, their status and their capacity to influence decision-makers. The country has many non-profit research insti-

tutes, a number of commercial research organizations, research units in most of the universities, as well as individual scholars interested in social research and social planning.

These organizations and individuals overlap, duplicate and rival each other. They compete for contracts and, in many instances, they are openly hostile to each other. Each one is quick to depreciate the work of the other and to dismiss it as not being "serious". Consequently, there is very little sustained research in which one project builds on another to produce a systematic body of knowledge.

The existence of so many organizations and individuals involved in social planning may be seen as a sign of high regard for social planning in Israel. On the other hand, it may be argued that this diffusion of responsibility and this lack of coordination bespeaks fundamental hostility to planning. What is everybody's business is nobody's business. In great measure, this characterizes the state of affairs in social planning in Israel.

There are many places where small and large efforts are going forward in social planning — universities, government, non-profit research institutes, commercial organizations. There is very little communication among these units and little knowledge of what the other is doing. This may simply be consonant with the confusion, duplication, overlapping and lack of coordination which is widespread in many fields of endeavor in Israel. Indeed, there are those who argue that this is a desirable state of affairs since it results in competition which spurs the competitors on to do better work. Competition is seen as healthy; it strengthens some organizations and eliminates those which are non-productive.

These "free enterprise" standards

may be appropriate in the economic sector in a capitalist society but they are hardly applicable, in my view, to the field of social planning in Israel. Eliminating duplication and overlapping will improve efficiency and make for better utilization of scarce resources. Israel has a number of similar competing organizations doing the same thing, producing a state of fragmentation and redundancy. This is an incontrovertible sign of dysfunctional inefficiency, since the organizations have no ideological or stylistic distinctiveness; they simply strive wastefully for the same limited space in the sun.

The efforts of existing research institutes to influence social policy have met with only limited success. Part of the problem lies in the tendency of officials who award research contracts to bury the findings if they fail to agree with their own proclivities. Still another aspect of the problem lies in the slow pace of the research. By the time results and recommendations are provided, the hour for decision has passed and the policy-maker has had to arrive at a conclusion without the research findings.

One serious difficulty is the dependency of the research institute on contracts for survival. The freedom of the research is inevitably limited by the knowledge that unpopular findings may be so embarrassing as to eliminate future research contracts. Since continued existence is desperately dependent on new contracts, researchers are constrained in their recommendations. Accordingly, program evaluation is weak or lacking altogether and there is no feedback to facilitate learning from mistakes.

Considerations such as the foregoing were, in part, responsible for the failure of a major effort recently organized by the Van Leer Foundation to influence the policy-making process. From 1971

to 1975, the Institute sponsored the Jerusalem Group for National Planning. It brought together some of the best brains in Israel, primarily from the universities. A high quality research staff was employed and a group of excellent scholars produced a number of impressive reports. However, the project has been abandoned since the discouraging conclusion was reached that the Group was having no influence on policy-making. In somewhat attenuated form, the Group continues as an opportunity to discuss relationships between Israel and the Diaspora.

The most hopeful development in the area of social planning is the establishment in 1974 of the office of Advisor to the Prime Minister on Welfare Services. This operation includes an inter-ministerial committee on social welfare, a committee of senior civil servants drawn from ministries concerned about welfare and a public council of citizens and scholars. There is also a small staff of social scientists who work on a part-time basis. Demonstration projects in coordinating local social services are going forward.

The work of this office has led to an important decision on social policy made by the Israeli Cabinet. It was agreed, on the recommendation of the Prime Minister's Advisor on Welfare Services, to give priority to selective services for the underprivileged rather than to universal services for the entire population. Program proposals and budget expenditures will now be considered in light of this policy decision. A commitment has clearly been made to use public policy for the redistribution of resources to disadvantaged groups.

Although it is probably too soon to make a judgement about the significance of this new structure, it may well become the focus for social planning, influencing governmental deci-

sions about priorities in the allocation of resources and in the differential distribution of benefits and services to particular groups and to particular geographical areas.

Such planful decision-making would appear to be essential if one reviews persistent social problems in such areas as education, poverty, immigrant absorption and integration.

One of the continuing social concerns of Israeli society is the field of education. There is considerable chagrin about the fiscal inability of the government to extend free education beyond the 9th grade. Many studies have been made in the field of education. It was difficult to ascertain whether or not these have had much influence on educational policy decisions. Where changes have been made, such as lengthening the school day, or establishing a junior high school system, it is hard to trace these to specific research findings or to demonstrate that the changes have improved the quality of education. Within this field, there is one recent illustration of lack of planning which is most disturbing. A political decision was made to expend 120 million pounds in order to improve education for children and adults in selected communities. It was hoped that these improvements would also have an impact on other human services. Twenty-eight communities were chosen without planning and the expenditure of the funds is also proceeding without planning. Considerable wastefulness in this instance derives, in part, from lack of planning and from extreme politicization of the social policy decision-making process.

With respect to poverty, a great deal of progress has been made. Social insurance and public welfare provisions now provide a floor on incomes, guaranteeing at least minimum mainte-

nance support for all Israelis. The social insurance system is reasonably well developed and there is some indication that the problem of over-crowded housing conditions is gradually being solved.

One issue in which social planning and social policy have had mixed success is the area of immigrant absorption. Vast numbers of newcomers were taken in when the State was first established. Unfortunately, the rate of immigration has now slowed to a trickle and the rate of emigration is climbing. This may indicate the failure of immigrant absorption procedures and policies. Certainly, the record of retention of immigrants from Western countries is not good. More than half the American immigrants leave and the fact that 300,000 Israelis live in America is a sad reflection of the fact that immigrant absorption policies and procedures leave something to be desired.

In some ways, the problem of immigrant absorption is a microcosm of the country's organizational and operational problems in the social and in other spheres. Inefficiency, duplication, over-lapping, low-productivity, lack of coordination and heavy-handed bureaucracy are wide-spread in Israel. All of these phenomena are to be found in the field of immigrant absorption beginning with the totally indefensible duplicate responsibility for immigrants which is held both by the Jewish Agency and the Ministry of Absorption. To these two major actors on the scene, one must add other government ministries — labor, welfare, health and housing. All of them have a hand in dealing with immigrants, resulting in confusion and poor service. Growing recognition of this problem may yet yield to some planful solutions.

It is certain that systematic planning in the field of immigrant absorption could readily lead to saner arrange-

ments, with consolidated responsibility, for helping immigrants. Systematic analysis would also probably provide the conclusion that the current preoccupation with special privileges for immigrants is simple-minded. No Western immigrant is induced to come to Israel because he can import a sewing machine duty-free. Planning and analysis could thus not only relieve the chaotic organizational condition; it would force rethinking about the present ingenuous approach to promoting aliyah which naively relies on special privileges and exhortation, neither of which have any real value. It would direct energies to more realistic approaches which would planfully take into account the culture and the psychology of the potential Western immigrant.

With regard to the problem of integrating the Oriental and Occidental communities, there is little evidence to support the general impression that military service and schooling are actually closing the gap. Statistics with respect to inter-communal marriage are unreliable. In any event, they can offer no comfort to those concerned about integration without any data about comparative rates of divorce between inter- and intra-communal marriages. No such data are available. Those social indicators which are available show large differentials between the Oriental and Occidental segments of Israeli society. Considerable concern exists that this numbing social problem is a time-bomb ticking away at the head of Israel. This concern is leading to concerted efforts which offer some hope for the future.

In each of these social problems — education, poverty, integration, immigrant absorption — there is a desire to work for solutions. There is a compelling need for intelligent planning, for specifying social goals and for defining the means for achieving them. The cli-

mate may well be warm enough now to indicate that careful planning can take place. There is every reason to believe that it must take place.

Conclusions

Specific

The large number of organizations and individuals engaged in social planning who fall over each other in competing for research contracts is dysfunctional. They all share in common a commitment to rational analysis and to careful planning which is not universally held in Israel. They need to act in unison; they need to act as though planning were possible; they need to sharpen their tools and they need planning to set their own house in order.

Israel cannot afford the kind of competition among social planners and social scientists which currently exists. It has neither the money nor the manpower to sustain the present wasteful duplication of effort. Financial stringencies could lead to precipitous hacking off of over-luxuriant growth. It would be much better if consolidation of some of the non-profit research institutes were planfully considered. They vary greatly in their capacities and in their resources. Pooling what they possess may be more productive than the present rivalrous situation in which resources are divided and dissipated.

It was particularly sad to note the reflection in Israel of competition between the two major Jewish women's organizations in the United States. This results in maintaining two separate institutes in Israel, with many overlapping interests, both of which suffer greatly from the lack of qualified manpower. A more coherent system of cooperation — even integration — should be considered.

If consolidation is not possible, then concentration and specialization should

be sought. Research institutes, out of their dependency on a steady flow of research contracts, may be driven to accept all kinds of projects which are beyond their capacity. Their range of activities is so enormous that they have no particular identity. The diffusion of effort is not supported by manpower capability since the available talent is limited in both quantity and quality. One way of overcoming some of these problems would be to focus on a relatively narrow range of issues. This kind of specialization would probably yield better results than are currently being obtained.

No one organization can possibly claim such comprehensiveness as to possess expertise in all fields. Readiness to undertake an extremely diffuse range of work is partly a response to the serious funding problems which constantly confront the research organizations.

While this response may be understandable, it sets in motion a self-defeating process. The effort to produce work in many fields has yielded results that are often less than satisfactory. The development by each organization of a special focus of interest should be considered. This should take into account the capabilities of the staff and the needs of the country. In my judgement, research organizations in Israel would do well to do some systematic planning for themselves.

General

Given the state of the art in social planning, the inherent difficulties and the built-in tensions between planner and political decision-maker, it is best to acknowledge the limitations of planning. Despite these limitations and within the reality of these limitations, decisions have to be made. Decisions can be stalled — commissions, committees, and studies are favorite techniques for

stalling. Some problems are even handled by a process of judicious neglect. But — the policy-maker cannot forever avoid coming to grips with the problems that confront him. Acknowledging the state of ignorance, he must make choices based on probabilities, not on certainties. He should be able to make informed guesses about the consequences of his choosing one option rather than another and the social planner should be in a position to advise about these consequences. However, such advice must include the recognition that social reality is hard, obstreperous and resistant. All possible consequences cannot be calculated. Allowances for unanticipated consequences may be insufficient. Therefore, it is crucial that both planner and decision-maker recognize their limits. As they undertake cost-benefit analyses, they must avoid mechanistic models which try to measure the unmeasurable. They must include moral accounting and moral judgment, calculations as to how human suffering can be diminished and how human values can be advanced. In the final analysis, social planners and social policy-makers must be people-oriented. They must recognize that planning as an effort to influence decisions is a long and arduous task. It requires patience, persistence, perseverance and political sophistication. It must reconcile the conflicting requirements of rationality and feasibility.

For individuals, planning is an everyday part of our everyday lives. We could not live a single day without planning. This point becomes clearer if it is stood on its head. The opposite of planning is chaos. The opposite of having a plan is having no plan. This would condemn us as individuals to haphazard, aimless, scattered and confused lives. Planning is the introduction of order and system. It

is the conscious and deliberate guidance of thinking directed towards creating and identifying logical means for reaching agreed-on ends. It is a basic approach to human problems. It is a point of view and an attitude which says that we can anticipate, guide and control our

affairs. Social planning is in fundamental harmony with Jewish tradition. It offers us the opportunity to put into practice our belief in social responsibility and in man's power to make his own fate. It is an iron necessity in these tempestuous times of radical change.