

Kibbutzim

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The first Israeli communal settlement called Kibbutz (pl. kibbutzim), was established in 1910 and is still thriving with over 500 inhabitants. 270 kibbutzim followed it, spearheading the Zionist movement project to settle Jews in Palestine that bred the Israeli state. Zionist organs bought the land and funded the settling of Socialist immigrants who created a new type of egalitarian, collectivistic, and democratic communes that grew much larger than all other communal societies, numbering some 129,000 people in the 1980s (The second largest, Hutterite communes, numbers about 40,000 people). The kibbutz engendered a voluminous political, ideological, and scholarly literature by hundreds of authors, as this society became "...a highly successful enterprise by virtue of its longevity (compared to almost every other utopian movement), as well as any other criterion by which the success of social systems is judged" (Spiro 1983: 4). Spiro explained kibbutz success by its productivity (5% of Israeli population produced 12% of GDP), as well as by a disproportionately large percentage of Israel's military officers, parliament members, and cabinet ministers, a superior schooling system, and many poets, novelists, artists, and scientists.

Other students explained success differently, but almost all researchers ignored two unique kibbutz characteristics unknown in any other communal society: great societal involvement and federative organizations (Hereafter: FOs. Stryjan 1989; Niv & Bar-On 1992; Shapira 2008). This was a fatal oversight since all other communal societies that have succeeded in terms of long endurance, a large and stable membership, and economic success, have channeled their main efforts inwardly, avoiding national efforts such as wars, intensifying internal relationships and insulating members from surrounding society. They blossomed at the price of marginalization, while, in contrast, the kibbutzim succeeded by intensive societal involvement as the serving elite of Zionism and rewarded for pioneering its hardest tasks by FO brokered resources (Yaar et al. 1994). The moshavim, less collectivistic settlements, gained more resources per capita but succeeded less in social and economic terms, although The kibbutzim invested heavily in national missions: financed the underground Palmach army of some 2500 people and the Mossad Le'alia Bet that transported and smuggled tens of thousands of Jews into Palestine, while conscripting 13% of its members for these missions and the British army in 1939-1945, as against 5% of the rest of the Jewish Palestinian community. Their prestige gained by leading Zionist struggles led to massive growth from 24,000 people in 1939, to 65,000 people in 1950 (Near 1992-1997).

Successful cooperatives tend to adopt capitalist practices with growth such as hired labor, bureaucracy, and autocracy instead of egalitarianism and democracy; they become conservatives and stagnate, ultimately failing and collapsing, and usually

becoming capitalist firms (Stryjan 1989). Stryjan found that kibbutzim were spared of this fate because their creativity maintained their original principles amid success and growth: Federalization retained smallness that enhanced innovation; they shared innovational know-how so that innovations proliferated among kibbutzim, while FOs performed functions that required economies of scale. Brumman's (2000) study of successful communal societies corroborated this: only decentralized communes succeeded beyond their founders' life span, since decentralization allowed them autonomy, preventing suppression of innovators by tenured autocratic leaders. However, when Stryjan was published, reality had changed radically, and the kibbutz success he explained had vanished: Most FOs and kibbutzim were in economic ruins, deep in a huge debt crisis which has required two national rescue packages costing the government billions in \$US terms. Many FOs had gone bankrupt, most of the rest radically downsized, and a wave of capitalist practices engulfed kibbutzim and FOs, so that today most kibbutzim have abandoned almost all communal practices.

Stryjan failed to discern the coming crisis and transformation, but his theory was correct: suppression of creative innovation engendered brain-drain and adoption of capitalist practices that eventually led to failures, collapse, and abandonment of communalism. He, like his predecessors, missed that kibbutzim and FOs were a social field (Bourdieu 1990), and FOs' capitalist conformity overwhelmed communalism of kibbutzim, suppressing creativity so that uniqueness vanished and ruinous processes abounded (Shapira 2008). Though already Kurt Lewin (1951) introduced field theory into social sciences, kibbutz research ignored the hundreds of FOs that were established from 1916, administered by some 4500 kibbutz members, and employing 15-18.000 hired employees in the 1980s, since studying them would have ruined the kibbutz image as egalitarian, democratic, and progressive. Powerful kibbutz leaders who headed the largest FOs suppressed early critical students of kibbutz such as Landshut (1944), and as FOs were located outside kibbutzim, later students defined them as non-kibbutz entities that were outside their purview, sparing themselves clashes with leaders, and gaining academic capitals by mistaken research (Shapira 2005). These leaders vanished long ago, but even recent research that alluded to FOs (e.g., Niv & Bar-On 1992; Yaar et al. 1994), ignored the contradiction between their practices and kibbutz ones, missing that most kibbutz elites gained status, power, prestige, and privileges as FO heads or functionaries, dominating the field as distrusted conservative oligarchs (Michels 1959[1915]), and castrating democracy and egalitarianism in kibbutzim as they enjoyed power, prestige, privileges, intangible capitals, and job continuity far greater than local officers (Shapira 2008). The latter were subject to a norm of compulsory job rotation formally aimed at preventing oligarchy, while, in fact, enhancing it: short-term kibbutz officers were at the mercy of tenured powerful FO heads, executives, and ex-executives who accumulated intangible capitals in FO jobs; they barred officers' initiatives and ruined trust in them by causing failure of officers' efforts to solve problems innovatively (Ibid: Chaps 12-15). Only in some kibbutzim, did high-moral powerful figures stick to democracy and enable creative innovations by local officers that enhanced trust in the latter and prevented brain-drain, while as most kibbutzim emulated these innovations, the field's success was prolonged for 10-20 years after these high-moral leaders had vanished and low-moral ones succeeded them (Ibid: Chaps. 15-17).

Kibbutz sociologists and anthropologists who evaded the study of half of the field, missed the cultural conflict between FOs and kibbutzim, the incompatibility of their practices, the true stratification, the field's dynamics, and failed to explain its crisis. Even critical sociologists detected only stratification inside kibbutzim, although FOs were much more stratified (Shapira 2005). Anthropologists were profoundly affected by their interlocutors who were mostly ideologists, FO functionaries, and other loyalists of FO heads who minimized the significance of FOs' capitalist conformity, missing that FO functionaries gained privileges and accumulated power and capitals contrary to kibbutz principles. Nor did they discern how national kibbutz leaders manipulated ideology to keep power, turning themselves into charismatic saviors who rescued kibbutzim from crises caused by their own political extremism, and how they remained unaccountable for FOs' capitalist practices they enjoyed while spending most of their time away from their home kibbutzim. Their offices in Tel Aviv were located in the vicinity of the government centre, and they mediated the flow of state funds to the kibbutzim, negotiated state land and loans for kibbutzim, obtained funds and contracts for kibbutz industries, conscripted members for political agitation that obtained them and their deputies seats in the parliament, and nominated deputies to be cabinet ministers to avert possible failures that would harm their prestige (Shapira 2008: Chaps 10-11). Thus, they kept power for half a century, but their capitalist conformity and suppression of radicals aiming at egalitarianism and democracy ruined the vitality of kibbutz cultures, and eventually communalism failed.

The kibbutz case proves the sociological fertility of Bourdieu's (1990) field, capital, and practice concepts, while pointing to the decisiveness of trust and moral leadership in the success of communal societies, social movements, and organizations (Downton 1973; Fox 1974; Shapira 2008).

SEE ALSO: Bureaucracy; Communal Societies; Charisma; Collectivism; Democracy and Organization; Federalism; Leadership; Oligarchy and Organization; Social Movements; Socialism; Trust; Utopia.

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