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Current Plans for Developing the Negev: A Critical Perspective

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The Negev – A Snapshot

The population of the Negev is a reflection of the geo-political changes that have affected the area since 1948, as well as the efforts undertaken by the State of Israel to consolidate its control of the Negev.

Comprising twenty-five percent of the population, the Bedouin - who for generations prior to 1948 were the only inhabitants of the Negev - have become a marginalized minority. During the 1948 fighting, most of the Negev Bedouin were expelled or fled; those who remained in Israeli territory were forcibly transferred into an area east of Beersheba known as the “Sayig,” east of Beersheba, an area that is smaller than that from which they were expelled, as well as more arid.

The Palestinian villagers who prior to 1948 lived in the northern part of the southern region of Israel – what is today the Ashqelon district – fled or were expelled, their villages were destroyed, and many of them were confined to the Gaza Strip, which changed hands several times and today is part of the Palestinian Authority.

Most of the Jews, who today constitute the majority of the Negev population, arrived after 1948, in a number of waves that were directed to the Negev by the government. The first wave of organized Jewish settlement arrived shortly before the declaration of the State of Israel, when the Zionist leadership of the pre-State Jewish population set up kibbutzim as “footholds” in order to establish a Zionist claim to this part of the country. A second wave of Jewish agricultural settlement came immediately after the establishment of the State, in the 1950s, as part of the attempt to block the routes along which Palestinian refugees were infiltrating back to their lands from the Gaza Strip and the southern Hebron Hills. The kibbutzim, established as part of these two settlement waves, were primarily populated by children of the

country’s veteran Zionist population, who were of largely European stock.

A third wave of Jews, larger than its two predecessors, arrived in the 1950s and 1960s. It consisted of Jews from the Arab countries, primarily in North Africa, who were settled in “development towns” and cooperative settlements known as *moshavim*. To this day, these *Mizrahi* Jews constitute the majority of the Jewish residents of the Negev.

In the 1960s and 1970s, major efforts were invested in putting the Jewish hold over the area on a solid footing, either through the construction of new urban localities, such as Arad, or the expansion of existing ones, primarily Beersheba. During the same period, an effort was also made to attract a “strong” (i.e. Ashkenazi or western) population to the urban localities of the Negev. In the 1970s and 1980s, affluent satellite or dormitory towns were established or expanded in the area. These include Omer (founded in 1949; it began to attract the better-off families from Beersheba in the 1970s), Meitar and Lehavim (founded in 1984 and 1985, respectively). These towns are the local equivalents of the *mitzpim* or hilltop settlements, established in the Galilee during the same period and offering middle and upper-middle class Jews a suburban life style.

The last major wave of Jewish residents arrived in the 1990s, in the wake of the mass Jewish emigrations from the countries of the former Soviet Union and Ethiopia. This wave expanded the area’s urban infrastructure, i.e. the development towns and Beersheba.

Continuous population growth has not changed the status of the Negev as Israel’s least populated area; it presently comprises less than eight percent of Israel’s total population. Furthermore, most Negev residents are at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder, as ranked by various important indicators, such as income, high

school matriculation, and college attendance.

At the same time, the Negev has a number of affluent “islands,” headed by Omer, Lehavim and Meitar. Overwhelmingly, the residents of these localities comprise the Negev’s executives and researchers, as well as senior officials in both the civil and the military echelons. These three towns rank among the country’s top ten localities with regard to average local salary levels (Schurtz, 2005). They also comprise three out of the country’s four communities with the highest rate of 20-29 year olds studying at academic institutions (together with the Galilee’s Kfar Vradim: Swirski and Konor-Attias, 2005).

At the other end of the socio-economic ladder is Israel’s poorest population group, the Bedouin, who today comprise about a quarter of the Negev’s population (around 150,000 out of approximately 550,000). Slightly over half of the Bedouin live in recognized villages that are at the bottom of the country’s rankings for practically all community-based socio-economic indices. The remaining Bedouin population live in localities that are not recognized by the State and hence lack the most basic services, such as clean water, electricity and telephone services, access roads, public institutions, schools, and service, commercial and industrial areas (Swirski and Hasson, 2005). The Negev Bedouin have the country’s lowest rate of high school matriculation. In 2005, the figure was just 26.6%, compared with a national figure of 44.9%; all seven of the recognized townships fall into the bottom quarter of the average community wages table; all seven of them belong to the localities with the highest level of jobseekers; and Rahat, the biggest recognized Bedouin locality, has Israel’s lowest rate of 20-29 year-olds studying at an academic institution (Swirski and Konor-Attias, 2005).

Among the Jewish localities in the Negev, the development towns have the lowest socio-economic level. In all of them –

Mitzpe Ramon, Yeroham, Dimona, Sderot, Ofakim, and Netivot – a large proportion of residents are employed in manufacturing and services jobs and fall into the medium-low income deciles. Sderot, Netivot, and Ofakim are classified as localities with the lowest average income levels among the country’s Jewish localities – only slightly above those of the Bedouin localities: while the average income (in 2002) earned by men in the seven recognized Bedouin localities varies between NIS 5,653 a month (in Tel Sheva) and NIS 6,033 a month (in Hora), in Sderot the equivalent figures (in 2002) were NIS 6,462, with NIS 6,555 in Netivot, and NIS 6,723 in Ofakim.

Beersheba, the Negev’s largest city, has a large number of neighborhoods whose situation does not differ much from that of the development towns. Overall, in 2002, the average income of males in Beersheba was NIS 8,861 a month. This was slightly higher than that of Jerusalem (NIS 8,373 a month), but Jerusalem has one of Israel’s highest proportions of ultra-Orthodox residents, whose employment-derived incomes are notably low; in contrast, average wages in Beersheba were lower than those of Israel’s two other largest cities, Haifa (NIS 10,743 a month) and Tel Aviv (NIS 11,088 a month). It should also be noted that the average Beersheba salary was much lower than that of Meitar, at NIS 16,242 a month, Lehavim, at NIS 18,201, and Omer, at NIS 19,146 a month (Schurtz, 2005).

Most of the Jewish agricultural localities (moshavim and kibbutzim) are also characterized by middle or lower income levels: the Hevel Ayalot, Bnei Shimon, Tamar, Eshkol, Sha’ar Hanegev, and Sdot Hanegev Regional Councils are categorized as regional councils with the lowest average income levels out of all of Israel’s regional councils (Schurtz, 2005).

The low income levels in most of the localities of the Negev make it difficult to generate a sufficiently broad tax basis to

finance local development. This is reflected in an examination of the sources of financing for Israel's local authorities, showing that the local revenues of the local authorities in the Negev (for their regular budget), calculated on a per capita basis, are lower than in other parts of the country: in 2004, while average per capita local revenue for the entire country (excluding Jewish settlements across the Green Line) amounted to NIS 3,194, for all the Negev localities together, the equivalent figure was NIS 2,559. The lowest income was recorded for the recognized Bedouin localities, at just NIS 628, with the highest being in Omer, Lehavim, and Meitar, at NIS 3,664 per capita. In the Negev's development towns, local revenues stood at an average of NIS 1,937 per capita, and in Beersheba, at NIS 2,983 per capita (all of the statistics in this paragraph and those below are taken from a special analysis by the Adva Center of data from the Interior Ministry, 2006).

In the absence of local resources, the government might have been expected to give particularly generous aid to the Negev localities, so as to enable their local authorities to provide the population with good services, and even to invest in local economic development. This was done for municipal budgets in the Israeli settlements in the Palestinian territories, which in 2004 amounted to NIS 1,949 per capita, while the equivalent financing for all of the local authorities in Israel averaged NIS 1,184 per capita. As far as the Negev is concerned, Beersheba received NIS 1,258 per capita, while the Negev's development towns received an average of NIS 1,401 per capita. True, in both instances this is more generous financing than the average for the aggregate of localities in Israel (at NIS 1,184 per capita), but less generous than what goes to the settlements over the Green Line.

The recognized Bedouin localities enjoyed even greater government support – NIS 1,786 per capita, approximately NIS 160

per capita less than the settlements. However, when the locally-raised income of the Bedouin localities, most of whose residents are poverty-stricken, is added to the income from the government, the resultant total (in the regular budget) of the local authorities in the Bedouin localities comes to NIS 3,143 per capita – compared with NIS 4,987 per capita in the development towns, and NIS 4,929 per capita in Omer, Lehavim, and Meitar.

When the scope of this analysis is taken beyond average income levels by locality and beyond government financing of municipal budgets, we find that the Negev has a very narrow economic basis. Before 1948, the Negev had no local economic infrastructure capable of providing a large population with a livelihood: the Bedouin eked out a precarious living from farming and trading. The pre-1948 rulers of the area – the Ottomans and British – did not see the Negev as an area worth developing economically, and hence did not provide it with any new resources. In contrast, Israel attached great importance to making the Negev an integral part of the country. As a result, it sent more and more people to live in the Negev, particularly Jewish immigrants from the Arab countries, and, somewhat later, it also took upon itself to provide them with jobs. Initially the country invested in the area's agricultural development, by bringing water down from the country's north. The water was provided to the kibbutzim and moshavim established in the area, but not to the Bedouin in the Sayig area - who, in contrast to the newcomers - had been farming for generations.

As in and by itself, agriculture could not serve as a source of income for all of the Jews who were settled in the Negev, the government initiated the development of new sources of employment. To a great extent, that development was based on the Negev's natural resources - primarily the potash and bromine to be found in the Dead Sea, and the phosphates of Nahal Zin

(today, most of the chemical plants belong to the Israel Chemicals group: Yiftachel, Gradus and Razin, n.d.: 8).

The chemicals industry was also unable to provide the Negev's growing population with a livelihood, as it is capital-intensive and generates a relatively small number of jobs (Newman, Gradus and Levinson, 1995: 16). Thus the government encouraged a new development project: in the late 1950s and 1960s, the Negev saw the arrival of labor-intensive industrial plants, particularly in the textiles industry. Employing thousands of people, these factories constituted the main "solution" to the need for employment for tens of thousands of new residents, many of whom had previously seen years of unemployment. (The 1990s saw the closures of the textile factories, as they moved to Jordan, Egypt and Turkey, where wages were cheaper.)

In the 1990s, as thousands of Jews from the former Soviet Union came to live in the Negev, employment in manufacturing in the area increased. This time, the increase took the form of new, labor-intensive plants in the electronics industry (Yiftachel, Gradus and Razin, n.d.: 8). While most of the plants were established north of Beersheba, in the Ashqelon district, some were set up in the Negev as well, particularly in Beersheba.

Despite the above developments, the most important source of employment in the Negev was and still remains - the State apparatus. The Jews who were settled in the Negev were accompanied by the panoply of the trappings of government: local authorities, police, schools, health services, welfare services, etc. Other State agencies moved to the Negev included the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), which turned the Negev not only into a training ground, but also into an instruction and storage area. In addition, the army also set up plants and services in the Negev. Together, the IDF, local governments and state-level services

have been and continue to be the biggest and only large-scale employer in the Negev.

As this short overview has shown, investments in the Negev have come and continue to come from outside the Negev itself – from the State's coffers, from the country's defense budget, from the owners of chemicals, textiles and food plants who live in the country's central region. The Negev has never managed to become a focus of independent economic development. The main manufacturing activities that take place in the Negev are controlled from the outside and directed towards the outside: production is earmarked for export or for use in the center of Israel, while ownership and management are in the hands of corporations headquartered in the country's central region; most of the profits find their way outside as well. A large proportion of the various industrial plants have their own individual ties with a nerve center outside the Negev, and the local link between each of them is tenuous at best.

Finally, it should be noted that the Negev has not really been involved in the main economic developments taking place in Israel over the last decade, the major ones being the growth of hi-tech industries and the financial services sector. These developments, which attract the lion's share of capital in Israel, take place in the center of the country, and to the extent that they trickle down, it is a very thin trickle that is not capable of generating a real turnaround in the economy of the Negev.

The Negev also suffers from the fact that the government, which for decades was a key factor in its economic development – whether by building the Yarkon-Negev water pipeline, or setting up quarrying industries, or encouraging the establishment of textile factories and army camps – is no longer taking initiatives or assuming responsibility for the development of the country in general and for the Negev, in particular, as it did in the past. This is the

result of an ideological change, a switch from the “developmental state” to a neo-liberal outlook that advocates reducing the state’s role and resources, turning the responsibility for economic growth and development over to the business community.

The Negev – once again the focus of attention?

However, in recent years a change has become discernible. Firstly, the state’s planning authorities have prepared a national outline plan – NOP 35 – as well as a district plan for the Beersheba metropolis. These two plans have implications for the development of the Negev in general, and the Bedouin localities in the Negev, in particular .

Secondly, in 2005 the “Daroma” association submitted “A National Strategic Plan for the Development of the Negev ” (henceforth: “Negev 2015”. This is the most comprehensive plan proposed to date for government investment in actions intended to help develop the Negev. On November 20, 2005, the Cabinet adopted the plan as part of its strategy for the 2006-2015 decade, in the framework of “government activities to promote the Negev’s development and growth” (Cabinet Resolution 4415). The Cabinet also decided to allocate from the state budget the amount of NIS 17 billion, to be spread over 10 years, for financing the implementation of the recommendations (Cabinet Resolution 4415, paragraph 5).

Thirdly, the Ehud Barak administration, and subsequently the Ariel Sharon administration, made a number of important decisions about the Negev Bedouin. In 2005, the National Security Council published a position paper based on the Sharon government’s decisions, which outlined ways of implementing them.

As a result of the Second Lebanon War, the date of implementation of Cabinet Resolution 4415 was postponed. The 2007 budget, a significant part of which was earmarked for financing the cost and consequences of the war, includes a sum of just NIS 400 million for the Negev development project.

Nevertheless, and in light of the Negev’s situation today, it may be reasonably assumed that in the future the government will once again return to the plans referred to above. Against this background, we consider the following analysis of the various development plans for the Negev an important exercise.

“Negev 2015”

Of all the plans discussed below, “Negev 2015” is the most comprehensive. In fact, it may be the only comprehensive plan ever put forward for the area. Negev 2015 proposes action on a broad range of issues, from transport and real estate through health and education. The plan both supplements and brings into focus proposals made earlier, in the framework of outline plans approved in previous years: National Outline Plan (NOP 35), and the “Beersheba Metropolis” outline plan (DOP 4/14). Negev 2015 also integrates plans that have been under discussion by the government for a considerable time, such as transferring IDF training bases to the Negev. Finally, unlike past government plans for developing the Galilee, which were in essence plans to “Judaize the Galilee,” Negev 2015 pays special attention to the Arab residents of the Negev – the Bedouin – and allocates resources to their benefit.

The plan was worked out by a group called “Daroma-Eidan HaNegev” (“Southward-The Negev Era”), a non-profit association headed by Tal Dillian and Haim Blumenblat, two colonels in the IDF reserves; Nir Gilad, formerly in charge of

budgets at the Finance Ministry; and Eitan Wertheimer, co-owner of the Iscar corporation. The Jewish Agency teamed up with this group. Half of Daroma's financing comes from Israeli sources, while the other half comes from Jewish sources in the Diaspora (Bassok, February 2, 2006). The group brought together persons from government and from the private and voluntary sectors, and used a team approach to focus on the following topics: (1) economic development, (2) infrastructure and environmental quality, (3) housing, (4) education, and (5) community and leadership.

In October 2005, the association submitted its plan to the Cabinet. In the words of its designers, the plan was intended to make the Negev into an "economically progressive area attractive to people and businesses, offering quality of life and residential caliber, and making it possible to achieve a diverse, multi-cultural community texture" (*Negev 2015*, background chapter).

On November 20, 2005, the Cabinet adopted the Daroma team's recommendations en bloc, in the framework of its operations for 2006-2015. It did this "in the framework of the government's actions to promote the development and growth of the Negev" (Cabinet Resolution 4415). The Cabinet also made a decision to allocate the amount of NIS 17 billion dollars from the state budget, to be spread over 10 years, to finance the implementation of the recommendations (Cabinet Resolution, Paragraph 5).

It should be noted that although this is a fairly impressive amount, if it is divided by the ten years covered by the plan, it boils down to around NIS 1.7 billion a year. While this is not a trifling amount, it is not sufficient to bring about real change, if we take into account the fact that for the Bedouin population, it purports to tackle economic development, improve infrastructure systems, upgrade the education system, and more – at one and

the same time.

Negev 2015 fills five volumes and covers a very broad range of topics and sub-topics. The discussion below will not address all of the areas covered: instead, it will focus on what I consider to be the core of the plan: bringing about the conditions necessary to attract about 200,000 Jews with high incomes to the Negev from the country's central region, as well as the assumption that these newcomers will start a chain reaction that will result in the development of the Negev and have a positive effect on all of its residents.

What's in a name?

The key to the crux of *Negev 2015* is to be found in its official name: "A National Strategic Plan for the Development of the Negev." This name hints at the existence of two goals: one, a national strategic plan, and the other, the development of the Negev.

The first half of the name indicates the plan's primary goal, which is to promote the strategic interest of the State, or, to be more precise, of the Jewish national state: to strengthen the State's hold on this sparsely populated, relatively remote part of the country (with eight percent of the country's population and 60 percent of its territory), which is surrounded on two sides by Arab countries. Most of the inhabitants of the Negev fall into Israel's lowest socio-economic category, and are viewed as a dependent population in need of constant support by State institutions. This population also includes a large minority (about one quarter of the total) of Muslim Bedouin; for many Jews, the Bedouin are objects of suspicion, whose loyalty to the State is less than total; this suspicion sometimes turns into fear, as a result of the group's high fertility rate. A combination of all of these factors apparently explains the first part of the plan's official name: "A National Strategic Plan."

The development of the Negev is the second half of the plan's official name. It is hard to escape the impression that the fact that this goal is to be found in the second part of the name is indicative of its secondary importance. And indeed, as will be seen below, the present-day residents of the Negev, Jews and Muslims alike, occupy a position of secondary importance in the plan's goals.

The fact that Negev 2015 has two goals does not help to focus it, among other things, because these two goals do not necessarily complement each other. Any complementarity exists only when the issue is examined from the vantage point of the Negev's present inhabitants and it is assumed that their development will contribute to strengthening the State's hold on the Negev. However, when one looks at the issue from the vantage point of the powers that be, strengthening the present-day population is just one of the ways of strengthening the State's hold over the area. The State has other options to choose from – including bringing in a new population that it considers more suitable and more reliable.

Attracting a strong population

This is the crux of Negev 2015: attracting some 200,000 new residents to the area, so that the population of the Negev will grow from 535,000 (in 2003) to approximately 900,000 in 2015. Because the current natural growth rate would increase the population of the Negev to no more than 700,000 by 2015, the balance is to come from Israel's central region.

The new residents in question are not envisaged as average Israelis. They are to be "a strong population," defined expressly as "families with high incomes" (Negev 2015, Chapter 2: 5, 33). Nor are these undefined "Israelis," but Jewish ones. This detail is not stated explicitly, but it is hard to miss the inference – first and foremost

because not many Palestinian citizens of Israel fall into the "strong population" category.

How is "a strong population" supposed to contribute to the development of the Negev? One possibility is to be found in the neo-liberal "trickle-down" theory, according to which a policy of making the rich richer – tax cuts, capital subsidies, financial incentives to individuals and corporations, "special" education and health tracks, and so on – ultimately help society as a whole, since in the long run the accumulated wealth at the top trickles down to the lower strata as well. Although not specifically stated by Negev 2015 authors, it can be reasonably assumed that they hope that the improved conditions offered to the "strong population" from Israel's central region will, in the long run, help the Negev's present-day "weak population" through the trickle-down effect. However, it must be said that the trickle-down theory no longer enjoys the strong support it had in the past, among other things because of the dubious reputation earned by "in the long run" theories. As the well-known British economist John Maynard Keynes once quipped, "in the long run - - - we are all dead."

But there is also a more short-term, practical approach through which it will be possible to show that bringing in "a strong population" will contribute to strengthening the Negev in economic terms. When the authors of Negev 2015 discuss the issue of wages, employment and educational disparities between the Negev and the central part of Israel, they state that the plan's objective is "to reduce the average wage gap," "to eliminate the disparity in student levels," "to bring jobless levels into line with the national rate," and so on (Cabinet Resolution 4415; Negev 2015, Chapter 2: 2). Now, a regional average can be improved in one of two ways. One is by improving the situation of every single individual, or at least the majority of them; while the other is to drastically improve the

figures by bringing in “a strong population.” The latter will raise the average for Negev residents as a whole without having to invest in any significant improvement in the situation of the present inhabitants of the Negev.

How is a strong population to be attracted to the Negev?

In its current condition, the Negev is unable to offer suitable employment to the desired “strong population.” This being the case, the authors of Negev 2015 suggest that the “strong population” come to live in the Negev but continue to earn their living in the central part of the country. “A considerable proportion of the Negev’s economic development must be based on commuting – i.e. the movement of a strong population to the Negev, most of whom will continue to work in the central area” (Negev 2015, Chapter 2: 5).

This is the very essence of Negev 2015, and what it does is to make it into a southern version of the Judaization of the Galilee project that involved the establishment of hilltop Jewish communities there. In 1979, the Israeli government initiated the creation of dozens of such communities in the Galilee. Within a decade, 52 of them had been built throughout the northern region of the country (Dor, 2004: 7). The “national strategic” goal of the hilltop communities project was “to promote the distribution of the Jewish population in the Galilee hills and to conserve State lands” (Sofer, 1992: 24; see also Dor, 2004: 9). The background to this was the Israeli government’s fears that in the wake of the peace agreement with Egypt, which was signed the same year and promised autonomy to the Palestinians in the Palestinian territories occupied in 1967, Palestinian citizens of Israel would want to obtain “national Arab autonomy” within Israeli territory (Dor, 2004: 14). The hilltop communities were established in the heart of areas with contiguous Arab communities (Dor, 2004:

15, 20-21); Sofer, 1992: 25-26). They followed the format of upscale dormitory communities devoid of any independent economic infrastructure; their residents derived their livelihoods by commuting to the large coastal cities (Lipshitz and Czymanski, 1990: 288; Sofer, 1992: 29; Dor, 2004: 41-42). From this point of view, the population of the hilltop communities was “a strong population,” just like the population the planners intend to bring into the Negev under Negev 2015. The hilltop communities did not succeed in changing “the demographic picture of the Jewish Galilee”; nevertheless, “their importance lies in their geo-political location and must be evaluated along these lines” (Sofer, 1992: 27).

How is a southern version of the hilltop communities project to be brought about? The solution proposed by Negev 2015 planners fits in with the spirit of the times: it must be remembered that the hilltop communities undertaking “was put into practice ... swiftly ... and was depicted entirely as a military operation or a rural-settlement undertaking along the lines of the 11 communities established on a single night in the Negev during the pre-State period” (Sofer, 1992: 24). In Israel, in the first decade of the 21st century, when the “strong population” is affluent, sophisticated, and pampered, population transfers cannot resemble military operations; a different strategy is called for. Accordingly, the Negev 2015 planners propose the creation of “high-caliber transport infrastructure and attractive housing, education and community options” (Negev 2015, Chapter 2: 5).

Below we will discuss each of these separately.

High-caliber transport infrastructure

Negev 2015 proposes upgrading the road and rail system that links the Negev with the country’s central region, in order to

significantly reduce distances and travel times. As for roads, the plan calls for extending “Highway 6” (the “Trans-Israel Highway”) to the Shoket Junction (instead of to the Ma’ahaz Junction, as in the current plan), and expanding to four lanes both the Lehavim-Arad road and the Beersheba ring road. As for rail transport, the plan proposes upgrading the Tel Aviv-Beersheba line and cutting journey times, as well as laying tracks alongside the Lehavim-Shoket-Arad road. In addition, it proposes laying tracks between Ramat Hovav and the Negev Junction, and between Ashqelon and Beersheba.

These road and rail connections are intended to enable the future inhabitants of the Beersheba-Arad-Lehavim triangle, and perhaps the new residents of more southerly localities, such as Yeroham, to reach their workplaces in Central Israel more quickly.

In addition to this infrastructure, intended to serve thousands of men and women, *Negev 2015* also proposes special services for the *crème de la crème*, such as a landing strip in Mitzpe Ramon, to serve the residents of the high-class neighborhood to be built on the rim of the Ramon Crater (*Negev 2015*, Chapter 3: 7). This landing strip would be in addition to the two such facilities that already exist in the Negev.

The *Negev 2015* view of transport infrastructure development places the emphasis on the link between the Negev and Central Israel. This is not the only way of developing the region’s transport: the Beersheba Metropolis outline plan offers a different approach, to be examined below.

Attractive housing

How are Israelis in the top income quintile to be enticed away from the central part of the country to come and live in the Negev? *Negev 2015* planners believe this can be done primarily by means of a “profound change in the housing experience of the Negev by using the area’s natural resources

to bring about real-estate products that are in short supply in Israel” (*Negev 2015*, Chapter 4: 5). The main component of the plan is the construction of some 10,000 “unique real-estate” units within the space of 10 years (*Negev 2015*, Chapter 4: 7). These units are to be unique in two ways. One is that they are to be built within or adjacent to attractive natural sites, such as Nahal Beersheba, Yeroham Lake, or the rim of the Ramon Crater; as well as round urban parks that *Negev 2015* planners suggest creating, in places that include Ofakim, Dimona, Yeroham and Sderot (Chapter 4: 29).

The second is that the new residents are to be granted unique building rights on particularly large plots – 2,000 square meters instead of the 500 currently allowed by the Israel Land Administration elsewhere in Israel. *Negev 2015* planners point out that this will require a change in the present-day outline plans (Chapter 4: 27).

Negev 2015 suggests three types of site where high-class residential units are to be constructed: (a) unique neighborhoods within urban localities; (b) unique rural sites; (c) ranches for farming/tourism activities – around 100 altogether (Chapter 4: 15, 18). In addition to these exclusive and unique real-estate units, the plan also suggests constructing “almost-unique” real estate, slightly lower in value, as well as regular real estate (Chapter 4: 7).

The view of real-estate development on which the *Negev 2015* planners base their proposals can be roundly criticized. What they are actually proposing is to offer Israel’s affluent groups the natural resources and scenery that belong to all Israelis. This view encounters harsh criticism when it is implemented in the center of the country: for example, the “Sea and Sun” residential project in North Tel Aviv, or the marina project in Herzliya. Not only do such projects lead to the destruction of unique landscapes and natural resources, they also negatively impact on the very

foundations of social equality and justice. As for the Herzliya marina project, it should be remembered that Israel's Supreme Court used environmental and socio-economic reasoning in its recent rejection of efforts by real-estate developers to change the designated purpose of the apartments constructed at the marina, from holiday and tourist abodes to regular residences. In this connection, the justices wrote the following: "It would appear that he [Mayor Eli Landau, who was interested in changing the designated usage] acted primarily to remove planning restrictions so as to enable private entrepreneurs to make a profit at the expense of protecting the special character of the site" (Mirovsky, *Ha'aretz*, December 10, 2006).

Privileged education

Negev 2015's proposals in the field of education are also primarily oriented toward the "strong population" expected to move to the Negev. The first paragraph of the section on education states that "fostering excellence in a number of ways will help to promote education in the Negev and to brand it as an 'utterly different educational experience'" (*Negev 2015*, Chapter 5: 4). The plan proposes three ways of fostering excellence: (1) establishing two multi-disciplinary centers of excellence (Chapter 5: 9); the planners note that "the centers of excellence are primarily intended for senior high school students specializing in five units in their chosen field" (Chapter 5, Part B: 1); (2) introducing a system of differential "rewards" for excellent schools and teachers (*ibid*: 9); and (3) a prestigious training program for outstanding school principals (*ibid*: 9).

This is yet another example of a way of thinking that is subject to considerable controversy. Firstly, the emphasis on fostering excellence is frequently used as a smokescreen for delivering high-caliber education to the affluent only. Secondly, introducing differential rewards is fiercely opposed by the teachers' organizations in

Israel as well as worldwide. Thirdly, a variety of bodies, including the State itself, have for years been running educational projects for those who excel – such as the boarding schools project, operant since 1960 – without great success. One individual student or another may benefit from a special project, but special projects fail to benefit the majority of students and fail to raise the general level of education in an area.

The Israel defense forces and the strong population

Another means of attracting "a strong population" is to move certain IDF units to the Negev. The planners state, "it is expected that moving IDF units to the Negev will bring about the migration to the Negev of a high-caliber population and strengthen economic development" (*Negev 2015*, Chapter 1: 27). This idea, first advanced some time ago, is now included in *Negev 2015*. The Cabinet, in its Resolution 4415, attaches great importance to this idea: "The plan is based, among other things, on transferring IDF camps to the Negev as a central step that will bring about and drive change, with the emphasis on transferring the technological units of the intelligence service and the central computer unit to the Greater Beersheba area and creating a hi-tech cluster and a 'training-camp city,' which will help drive economic development, [attract] a high-caliber population, and [encourage] the development of educational and community systems" (Cabinet Resolution 4415).

Now, the Negev has served for many years as a center for IDF camps and training areas. At the time of writing, many of those who live in the area's development towns, moshavim and kibbutzim are employed by the IDF or the Defense Ministry. It can reasonably be assumed that the additional population expected to come to the area as a result of transferring camps and installations will not be particularly large – *Negev 2015* planners talk in terms of

“hundreds of families” (Chapter 1: 27).

The main innovation does not lie in the size of the population to be lured to the Negev to work in IDF compounds, but in the distinction between the two populations that have ties with the IDF: the high-caliber population (to be brought in), and its non-high-caliber counterpart (already living in the Negev). This distinction reappears throughout *Negev 2015*, whether in the form of a contrast between the present-day population and the “strong population” that the planners wish to attract, or the contrast between the types of military personnel. As a rule, it may be said that *Negev 2015* is replete with stereotypical images of the various population groups.

There is one Negev population – the Bedouin – that will derive no benefit whatsoever from the steps proposed above. The Bedouin are entirely excluded from the division between high-caliber and non-high-caliber military personnel, because as a group they are not recruited by the IDF. A small minority enlist on a voluntary basis, and they serve primarily as scouts or as combat troops in the “Bedouin patrol battalion.” The expansion of IDF bases and operations might even harm the Bedouin, if some of the planned camps and installations were to end up on lands claimed by Bedouin.

***Negev 2015* and the Bedouin**

The proposal to attract “a strong population” of approximately 200,000 people to the Negev is the locomotive that is to pull along the other carriages of the *Negev 2015* plan in its wake. We highlight this component because it constitutes the very heart of the entire project. Having identified the locomotive, we will now examine *Negev 2015*’s proposals in relation to a number of the groups that are supposed to be pulled along by this locomotive.

We will begin with the Bedouin. Given the economic and social situation of the

Bedouin, they are very far from what the *Negev 2015* planners refer to as “a strong population.” Let it be said immediately that the situation of the Bedouin is so bad that any of the measures proposed for them by *Negev 2015* should be welcomed. However, the interesting question is whether the *Negev 2015* proposals actually have the potential to significantly improve the situation of the Bedouin.

The first point to make is that *Negev 2015* does not tackle the two main issues that hold up – or prevent - any improvement in the situation of the Bedouin: (1) the land issue, and (2) the issue of recognition of “unrecognized” Bedouin localities. It is as if these issues have been defined by the *Negev 2015* group, or by persons in government circles with whom group members have been in touch, as “off limits.” It goes without saying that without a solution to these two issues, the possibilities of reducing the gaps between the Bedouin and the Jews, including Jews who do not belong to “a strong population,” shrink drastically.

The two most significant measures recommended by *Negev 2015* are in the areas of infrastructure and education. At some NIS 1.8 billion, the infrastructure area is slated to receive the largest financial investment of all the *Negev 2015* plans earmarked for the Bedouin. It is noteworthy that this amount is part of a larger amount, approximately NIS 2.4 billion, that two official bodies recommended investing: one body is the government committee examining improvements in the situation of the permanent localities in the southern Bedouin sector, which submitted its recommendations in 2001; the second is the Abu Basma District Council, designed to serve a number of Bedouin localities in the process of attaining official recognition (see *Negev 2015*, Chapter 3: 6). To date, the government has expended approximately NIS 600 million on this matter, and hence the amount still awaiting disbursement, according to the *Negev 2015*

recommendation, is NIS 1.8 billion. This amount is designated primarily for water, sewage, garbage disposal, electricity and communications - and in the Abu Basma localities, roads as well (*Negev 2015*, Chapter 3: 28-30).

This sum of NIS 1.8 billion is intended for recognized Bedouin localities: Rahat, Laqye, Hora, Segev Shalom, Ar'ara, Kuseife and Tel Sheva – plus the localities earmarked for inclusion in the Abu Basma District Council. The Bedouin localities that are “unrecognized” but not in the process of being recognized, and whose population is estimated at between 40,000 and 50,000 individuals, are not slated to benefit from the infrastructure investments. It should be noted that most of the investments in question are designed to bring the Bedouin localities up to the most basic level. To date, none of the recognized Bedouin villages has had sewerage systems, and their road, water, communications and electricity systems are of a very poor standard. In order to evaluate the expected contribution of the measures recommended by *Negev 2015*, benchmarks should have been constructed to allow comparison between existing infrastructure levels in Jewish localities and infrastructure levels in the Bedouin localities following implementation.

The *Negev 2015* recommendations’ second largest investment in financial terms is the investment in education. Here the figure is between NIS 150 and NIS 160 million annually, or between NIS 1.5 and NIS 1.6 billion in ten years – approximately a third of the total investment in education in the Negev recommended by *Negev 2015* (Chapter 5: 32; Chapter 1: 10). Of this amount, the lion’s share is earmarked for the construction of classrooms and buildings. Smaller sums are designated for upgrading early childhood education, improving the quality of teaching, and training school counselors and psychologists. Another amount is designated for programs to encourage

excellence.

Given the poor state of the Bedouin educational system today, all of these investments, including each in turn, are undeniably absolutely vital measures. However, it is a moot point whether they can be viewed as a “massive investment” that will bring about equality between Bedouin and Jews. It appears that the investments in question are intended to obviate some of the most flagrant gaps. For example, of the multi-disciplinary centers of excellence that *Negev 2015* is proposing for the Negev, one is to be affiliated with Ben-Gurion University and the other with Sapir College. The question is why *Negev 2015* does not include a proposal for an Arabic-speaking multi-disciplinary center to be set up at the Shoket Junction area, where and near which most of the Bedouin localities are located, given the fact that Bedouin children aged 5-19 make up a third of this entire age group in the Negev (Center for Bedouin Studies and Development and Negev Center for Regional Development. 2004: Table 2/5).

Finally, it should be repeated that these funds are primarily earmarked for the recognized localities. In the “unrecognized” localities, many children will continue to walk long distances in order to attend school.

The third area addressed by the *Negev 2015* team is economic development. Compared to the relatively large-scale investments proposed for infrastructure and education, the proposals in the field of economic development are somewhat limited. One of them is opening job training centers, along the lines of the welfare reform pilot program in operation in several localities in Israel, while the second involves encouraging small businesses. This is particularly surprising given the fact that a number of researchers have already worked out very detailed, wide-ranging proposals which, among others, include creating new industrial areas, a variety of industrial

plants, a hospital, agricultural projects and more (for example, see Abu-Saad and Lithwick 2000). Another possibility that might have been raised by the *Negev 2015* team is integrating the Bedouin into the large number of projects and plants they suggest setting up in the Negev - first and foremost among them - hi-tech clusters, as well as chemical and electronics plants.

While the investment recommended in the economic development sphere falls short of meeting actual needs, *Negev 2015* proposes budgeting an extremely large amount in order to address a different “Bedouin problem.” This involves an annual figure of some NIS 200 million in each of the first five years, which is to be earmarked for reducing crime and “improving the image of the Negev.” This sum amounts to one-eighth of the total *Negev 2015* budget. The underlying idea is to tackle property offenses, as well as the extortion of protection money from businessmen. The latter criminal activity results in business people incurring major expenses, and it also makes it harder to start new enterprises (*Negev 2015*, Chapter 2: 21, 31). Over the years, many cases have been recorded in which Bedouin were found to be involved with such criminal offenses. The question is whether it would not be more logical to invest larger sums in education and employment – and, of course, in solving the problem of land disputes and “unrecognized” villages - all major factors behind the turn to crime.

This analysis of *Negev 2015*'s treatment of the Bedouin is not complete without a comment on the chapter addressing the topic of infrastructure and the environment. This part of the work includes a document by Dr. Aharon Zohar highlighting the environmental deterioration that has taken place in the Negev and stating that the “human factor” is overwhelmingly responsible for this state of affairs. This statement hardly comes as a surprise, since the worldwide environmental protection movement identifies exhaust fumes from

vehicles and industrial plants, setting fire to forests and diverting rivers – all man-made activities – as major causes of environmental degradation. However, what does come as a surprise is that of all people, Zohar identifies the Bedouin, with their low socio-economic status, as the main cause of “environmental stress” (*Negev 2015*, Chapter 3: 8). Zohar goes on to state that there are three causes for “the negative effect of the Bedouin on the environment in the Negev”: (1) high birthrate, increasing the demand for limited environmental resources and increasing the generation of all kinds of garbage; (2) low socio-economic status, reflected, inter alia, in the absence of proper sanitation services leading to health hazards such as the proliferation of rodents and insects, plagues of mosquitoes and bad smells; and (3) spatial expansion of Bedouin localities, leading to the spread of these same hazards (Chapter 3: 9-10).

Such statements are hard to understand, given the fact that since the establishment of the State of Israel, the wide open spaces of the Negev have altered almost beyond recognition as a result of activities undertaken by Jews: the construction of roads, landing strips, high-tension wires, urban housing projects, army camps, firing ranges, sites for chemical and radioactive waste, exhaust fumes from vehicles and aircraft, jeep tours, and so on. Hence it is hard not to interpret Zohar's focus on the Bedouin, of all people, as an expression of racism, or, alternatively, as the reflection of a desire common to many government bodies: to force the Bedouin to abandon their lands and move into a small number of recognized localities. It should be noted that later in the document, Zohar does broaden his scope and refer to some of the factors enumerated above as being responsible for the deterioration in the quality of the environment in the Negev, in addition to making the point that it is necessary to invest in empowering the Negev's communities, and especially the Bedouin, by means of education and employment

(Negev 2015, Chapter 3: 24). Nevertheless, the emphasis on the Bedouin as the cause of “environmental stress” is outrageous. In this respect, it is worth quoting a passage from Elisha Efrat’s book, *National Planning and Development in Israel in the Third Millennium*:

Reality in Israel shows that any space-related, industrial or technological subject which is inherently problematic, or any land use which for ecological and environmental reasons does not suit the authorities in terms of location within the bounds of populated Israel, is shifted to the northern Negev as a one-off solution to a specific problem. Today the site at Ramat Hovav constitutes the largest harmful industrial concentration in Israel: it extends over hundreds of dunams and has even acquired the status of an independent municipal authority. Within the boundaries of this site there is planned a large-scale incinerator to dispose of organic and other waste, with a capacity of incinerating some 20,000 tons annually, in addition to the ordinary garbage which it will receive on a regular basis, as well as handling the gradual incineration of dangerous organic waste, amounting to 30,000 tons, which have accumulated over the years. Likewise, the evaporation ponds at this site concentrate the effluent of some 20 plants, making worse the smell nuisances which have extended as far as the localities of Ramat Hanegev, Yeroham, Dimona, southern Beersheba and the environs. With the government’s decision to gradually close down some 350 unlicensed garbage dumps throughout the country and send all the garbage to two central and three secondary sites, it has been resolved that one of the central sites is the Dudaim site north-west of Beersheba, which is supposed to take the garbage from central Israel; the old phosphates quarrying site at Oron is supposed to be used as a national landfill site for garbage; Mishor Rotem has become an open-cast mine which impacts adversely on the landscape and fauna and where the groundwater is polluted, with dust constantly rising

from the surface; a large quantity of effluent that has accumulated in the oxidation ponds of the Nuclear Research Center (NRC) near Dimona has been run off down one of the wadis that drains into the Makhtesh HaKatan, and findings have even indicated the presence in this effluent of radioactive materials, about whose quantity and degree of toxicity there is still disagreement among experts; it has been decided to make the NRC site an area subject to ongoing monitoring and sampling because within its bounds there take place radioactive-waste storage and burial activities; the Dimona site stores spent uranium rods with high-intensity radioactivity levels, as well as low-level radioactive waste which is brought to it from the Nahal Soreq site and from some 300 medical and industrial sites throughout Israel; water previously used for rinsing phosphates, contaminated with nitrates, chlorine, magnesium and other salts, is brought to the evaporation ponds at Nahal Teren in the Zin Valley. This water is supposed to evaporate without leaving any residue on the surface, but it has permeated to the groundwater and also got into the springs; at the Zin and Oron plants, there is damage similar to that at Mishor and Rotem; in the Ramon Crater there is large-scale mining and quarrying in the area which has been declared a nature reserve; while in the Makhtesh Hagadol there are clay and pure sand works that cause damage similar to that at the Ramon Crater; Beersheba, the area’s main large-scale city, adds to the environmental pollution of the northern Negev and is not managing to maintain its former quality of life: because of its rapid population growth it is not managing to deal with the sewage produced by it, and as a result raw sewage is making its way along Nahal Beersheba, Nahal Habesor and Nahal Patish, creating an extensive open sewage system that stretches as far as the outskirts of the town of Ofakim.” (Efrat, 2003: 143-144).

Efrat himself, it should be added, also speaks of the need “to save the country’s

lands” from the Bedouin (2003: 144). However, at least he refrains from charging them with responsibility for the environmental destruction of the Negev.

***Negev 2015* by-passes the development towns**

The crux of *Negev 2015*, as shown above, is the idea of attracting “a strong population” to the Negev. At the same time, the planners focus major attention on the Bedouin population of the Negev, particularly with regard to infrastructure and education. In contrast, the plan appears to largely by-pass another major population sector: residents of Jewish development towns.

Persons residing in the development towns and in many of the moshavim would appear to belong to what the *Negev 2015* planners would call the “non-strong population”; less “non-strong” than the Bedouin, but far from being the kind of persons that *Negev 2015* would like to attract to the area. In all spheres – educational achievements, workforce participation, salary levels, percentage living under the poverty line – the statistics for most of the Jewish residents of the Negev are not impressive. For example, as we have seen, the average salary in some of the development towns is not significantly higher than the average salary in the permanent Bedouin townships.

As shown above, *Negev 2015*’s primary interest is in strengthening the “national strategic” status of the Negev. Theoretically, in order to achieve this goal, it might have suggested strengthening the existing population, through massive investments in education, employment, services and housing. The fact that *Negev 2015* preferred instead to focus on attracting a strong population from central Israel constitutes proof that as far as the planners are concerned, the present-day population, including the Negev’s Jewish residents, is not only not the type of population desired, but also it is highly unlikely that this

population can be sufficiently strengthened to constitute the right type of population in the future.

Negev 2015 makes this point explicitly. The chapter on education contains a document prepared by Nahum Blass of Blass Socio-Educational Planning and Consultancy Ltd. Consisting largely of demographic, physical and educational data, the document notes that “the faster growth in the number of students in the south and the Negev is almost entirely concentrated in the populations of students from weak socio-economic backgrounds (the Bedouin), or from an ideological background alienated from the values of modern western society (the ultra-Orthodox)” (*Negev 2015*, Chapter 5, Appendix: 7). It must be said that the ultra-Orthodox in question are largely Mizrahi youngsters studying at Shas educational institutions. For its part, the expansion of the Shas political party constitutes a historical reflection of the failure of the system to offer youngsters from the development towns high-quality education leading to a school-leaving certificate, to university, and to jobs with reasonable wage levels. So as if it were not enough that in the past the State gave up on a potential workforce comprised of youngsters from the development towns, now the *Negev 2015* plan comes along and gives up on them yet again: as Nahum Blass writes, “without extremely significant upgrading of the educational system in the Bedouin sector, and in the parallel opening up ultra-Orthodox education to subjects such as sciences and English, there is no chance whatsoever that the development of the Negev can be based on the local populations.” This negative evaluation of the local populations is the implied explanation for why *Negev 2015* planners opted for the alternative of attracting a newer, stronger population from the outside. It should be noted, however, that unlike his fellow members on the planning team, Blass himself is pessimistic about the possibility of attracting such a population: “The alternative of providing an external

‘blood transfusion’ – shifting IDF camps, large-scale migration from other parts of the country, or a new wave of immigration, does exist, but in our opinion both the likelihood of its happening as well as its ability to make a difference are limited.” (*Negev 2015*, *ibid*: 8).

The only part of the *Negev 2015* recommendations that can be seen as targeting the existing Jewish population of the Negev is one section in the chapter on economic development that discusses how to attract investments to the Negev. True, the *Negev 2015* team note, “a key part of the Negev’s economic development must be based on commuting” (*Negev 2015*, Chapter 5: 5), but present-day residents of the Negev are supposed to benefit from the State giving advantages to investors interested in coming to the Negev, encouraging small businesses, helping with the development of the tourist sector, and providing incentives for strategic investments in electronics, hi-tech and chemicals. The *Negev 2015* team has also adopted the idea put forward by Shraga Brosh, president of the Israel Manufacturers’ Association: moving some 50-100 traditional industrial plants to the Negev (Chapter 5: 8). The area earmarked for these plants is the N.A.M. at Netivot; the plants are also slated to hire workers from Ofakim and Sherot - two other development towns in the vicinity.

Since 1950, the development towns have functioned as centers of traditional industries. This was one of the factors in their lagging behind the rest of the country. The question is: why *Negev 2015* does not offer development-town residents tools that will enable them – and their Bedouin neighbors – to join the modern economy? Sad to say, it appears that *Negev 2015* foresees a future for the present residents of the Negev that strongly resembles that of the past and the present: poorly paid jobs in low-tech industries.

As far as education is concerned, the main suggestion in *Negev 2015* that might also be relevant to development town residents is “fostering excellence” – a euphemism for introducing a special high school track for high achievers (*Negev 2015*, Chapter 5: 7-9). The main group targeted by this proposal consists of the children of future migrants from central Israel. It can reasonably be assumed that this special track will also serve the local affluents (Chapter 5: 7-9). An alternative would be to devise a plan to upgrade the entire educational system, in order to bring it up to the same level as that in the affluent localities in Israel’s central region, so that in the future the entire population of the Negev will be able to take part in the knowledge-based sectors of the economy.

The National Outline Plan (NOP 35) and the Beersheba Metropolis Plan (DOP 4/14/23)

In 2005, the government approved National Outline Plan (NOP 35), the purpose of which is to determine how Israel’s physical territory is to be used up to 2020. NOP 35 applies to all planning activities undertaken in Israel, on the national, district and local levels.

NOP 35 replaces NOP 31, drawn up in 1991 at the peak of the large-scale wave of immigration from the former Soviet Union. NOP 31 was intended to remain in force no more than five years, but in practice it lasted until the approval of NOP 35 in 2005. NOP 31 apparently reflected a national policy of giving immigrants a “free choice” in all matters relating to where they would live (Leshem 1998: 44). This ran counter to the policy implemented in the early decades of statehood, when the government assumed the responsibility for settling newcomers and finding housing and employment for them. Given a “free choice,” most of the newcomers chose to live in the center of the country. At the same time, a major demand developed

among affluent Israelis for suburban housing. These two phenomena brought about pressure on the existing housing infrastructure, with a resultant tendency towards urban sprawl encroaching upon open and agricultural areas. NOP 31 simply took a “snapshot” of Israel’s urban development picture and focused development efforts on the center of the country (Morgenstern, May 1, 2005).

NOP 35, which took an inordinate amount of time to come into being, is designed to apply the brakes to this trend of urbanization and suburbanization, and to conserve Israel’s open and agricultural areas. The plan divides the country into a number of “textures,” a concept that combines two main land uses: land for development, and land for conservation. These textures differ from each other in terms of the quantitative relationship between developmental and conservational land uses. NOP 35 defines a number of texture types: **urban**, where most development activities are to be concentrated in the future; **rural**, where agricultural development is to be allowed, on condition that the area’s rural nature be preserved; **national conservation**, earmarked as an open, natural area, intended for leisure and recreational activities, but also for defense system activities; **mixed conservation**, where both residential and agricultural development is to be allowed; and **coastal conservation**, designed for the purpose of conservation of the open coastline area.

The national outline plan identified ten objectives to be achieved by it. The first is “responding to the planning and building needs of the State of Israel, while directing the bulk of development to urban ‘textures’ and reducing suburbanization.” This is an entirely laudable goal, particularly in the central part of the country, where suburbanization is threatening to gnaw away at the remaining agricultural and open spaces. However, the critics of NOP 35 wasted no time in pointing out that the plan

confers legitimization on the establishment of new urban centers, instead of increasing densities in existing towns and annexing agricultural areas to the urban textures (Morgenstern, May 1, 2005). Once again, the critics relate primarily to the situation in the center of the country.

The Negev appears in the next two objectives of NOP 35. Objective no. 2 designates Beersheba as one of the four metropolitan areas where development activities are to be concentrated in the future. The third objective designates Beersheba as one of three highest-priority development objectives in Israel (in addition to Jerusalem and the Galilee).

We will focus our discussion on the plan for the development of the Beersheba metropolis. However, we must first present two more of the NOP 35’s ten objectives. One is “responding to the varied demands of different sectors of the population while narrowing gaps between different sectors and regions,” while another is “encouraging cooperation among local authorities and promoting coordinated regional planning.” These two objectives, which constitute principles for how to proceed, are of major importance to our discussion of the Negev, and in particular of the Negev’s Bedouin population. As we will see, the outline plan for the Beersheba metropolis does not fully meet the needs of the Bedouin sector, and it is doubtful whether it can significantly contribute to reducing the gaps between the Bedouin and their Jewish neighbors. In addition, it would appear that any “cooperation among local authorities” takes place, if at all, on the lowest level. One of the main obstacles to such cooperation is the fact that about 40% of the Bedouin live in “unrecognized” communities, i.e. localities that have no local government, and hence are unable to actively participate in any “cooperation among local authorities.” In order to gain access to the planning process, the residents of the “unrecognized” localities had to set up an umbrella organization of their own and to petition the High Court, which did in fact order that they be involved in the process. However, in the meantime, participation is only partial (see Swirski and Hasson, 2005: 29).

Returning to Beersheba, we move on from NOP 35, whose purview is the whole of Israel, and focus on DOP 4/14/23 – the district outline plan for the Beersheba metropolis. This district outline plan has gone through a number of versions. It was officially approved as long ago as 1998, under the name DOP 4/14. However, even earlier, in 1994, the Negev Bedouin petitioned the High Court, arguing that the then plan-in-the-making took no account of the needs and wishes of the Bedouin Arab population, including the possibility of living in rural communities (HC 1991/00). Six years later, in 2000, the High Court ordered the State to prepare an outline plan that would take account of the petitioners' requests: DOP 4/14/23 is the outcome of this High Court ruling. However, although the High Court set a period of one year for submission of the amended plan, version number 1 of the amended district outline plan was not submitted until April 2005. Before this submission, ACRI, the Association of Civil Rights in Israel, petitioned the High Court, arguing that the plan being worked out did not meet the population's needs, nor did it comply with the State's obligation to the High Court (HC 1991/00, September 28, 2005, reaction by petitioners). According to ACRI, ever since the High Court asked for an alternative plan to be drawn up, the authorities had adopted a foot-dragging policy. ACRI argued further that without the Supreme Court's vigilant eye, the authorities would have entirely failed to meet their obligations. Furthermore, the authorities were continuing "to implement two separate planning tracks: one is slow and arduous, for the Negev Bedouin population, involving the preparation of DOP 4/14/23; while the second is high-speed and fast track, for the Jewish population, through 'implementation' of the government decisions asking for dozens of new communities and individual ranches to be set up for the Jewish population, not through DOP 4/14/23" (Hamdan, 2005). On June 27, 2005, ACRI came back to the High Court and expressed disappointment

at the outline plan being prepared, because it "does not provide a response to the petition, nor does it provide a response to the obligations of the planning institutions that were established in the framework of the petition" (HC 1991/00, June 27, 2005, reaction by petitioners). ACRI added that "the plan continues a discriminatory planning policy that enables the Jewish residents to live in a broad range of localities, including the smallest ones, such as new kibbutzim, communities with fewer than 20 families, and individual ranches" (HC 1991/00, June 27, 2005, reaction by petitioners). Finally, the Association complained that the plan being prepared "leaves about 50,000 inhabitants, constituting nearly 65% of the unrecognized villages ... without any potential to achieve planning regularization in the future" (HC 1991/00, June 27, 2005).

In addition to all of this, implementation of the High Court recommendation that Bedouin residents of the Negev be involved in shaping the outline policy is minimal. In the wake of the High Court ruling, a steering committee was set up, whose members included Bedouin representatives. However, the steering committee does not take part in the planning work as such, simply holding occasional meetings with the planning team (Amer Al-Huzayyel, interview, June 5, 2005).

The following discussion of DOP 4/14/23 is based on the document, "Fundamentals of Planning Policy" (Version No. 1), submitted in April 2005. To make the reader's life easier, we will refer to this as *Beersheba Metropolis*.

Spider vs. sun

The key objective of *Beersheba Metropolis* is "to create a metropolis – to turn the Negev into a metropolitan area with Beersheba at its center, as a competitive and unique alternative to the other metropoli" (*Beersheba Metropolis*: 16). Elsewhere the document describes the objective as

follows: “To turn the entire metropolitan area into an area of choice and commuting” (*Beersheba Metropolis*: 99); i.e., to transform the Beersheba area into a place that has everything individuals need to live, work, shop, study, relax, and so on. To this end, “a first condition ... is a sophisticated transport system that guarantees reliable, convenient, high-speed and egalitarian access to the entire area” (*Beersheba Metropolis*: 99). *Beersheba Metropolis* sees the metropolitan transport network as the driving force for urban development, and in the context of the Beersheba area, as a “metropolis-building network” (*Beersheba Metropolis*: 30). From this point of view, the graphic expression that summarizes the overarching view of the *Beersheba Metropolis* planners is a diagram showing the metropolitan transport network as a spider’s web (p. 33), whose center is the city of Beersheba, with concentric circles radiating out from it, connected by intersecting roads (*Beersheba Metropolis*, diagram 1.2, p. 34).

These basic principles enable us to compare *Beersheba Metropolis* and *Negev 2015*. As explained above, the crux of *Negev 2015* is to attract some 200,000 high-income Jews from the central part of the country to the Negev. In order to attract this “strong population,” the *Negev 2015* planners propose investing in improving the transport connection between the Negev and central Israel. This connection is supposed to enable the new residents to live in the Negev while continuing to work in the country’s center. In other words, the development approach guiding *Negev 2015* is based on the assumption that the Negev’s hopes lie not in the Negev itself, but outside it. In contrast, *Beersheba Metropolis* assumes that the Beersheba district can and should become a self-contained independent area, one that will enable its residents to satisfy most of their needs within that same space. True, like *Negev 2015*, *Beersheba Metropolis* states that “the basis of the economic development of the Beersheba Metropolis area – [involves]

investing in the existing human capital and to an even greater extent in importing human capital, generally of residents of Israel’s center and new immigrants” (*Beersheba Metropolis*: 97). In addition, *Beersheba Metropolis* also states that “investing in transport would bring the center of the country closer to the metropolitan area and make it possible to move southward from the center and vice versa: such investment would bring the south closer to the center and permit mobility (or commuting) on the part of the population to the employment centers” (p. 99). In addition, *Beersheba Metropolis* employs terminology similar to that of *Negev 2015*: “it will be possible to encourage the “strong” urban populations to move from the center of the country to the metropolis on the basis of generous allocations of land for suburban construction projects” (p. 99).

Nevertheless, unlike the *Negev 2015*, the emphasis in *Beersheba Metropolis* is on the metropolitan area itself. While the *Beersheba Metropolis* planners state that “it will be possible” to encourage a “strong population” to move to this part of the country – this step is not the crux of their plan.

Admittedly, it may be argued that the difference between the two plans lies in the fact that as a physical planning document for the district, *Beersheba Metropolis* must focus on the area itself, while *Negev 2015*, as a “national strategic” plan, can adopt a wider-ranging, “national” point of view. However, *Beersheba Metropolis* could have adopted the approach of *Negev 2015*; instead of recommending a “spider’s web” for the region’s transportation system, it could have recommended a sun-like transport network, based on direct transport links between the center of the country and main points in the Negev. A classical example of this can be found in Argentina, where the dominance of the capital, Buenos Aires, is physically expressed in the fact that all of the country’s main roads leave

from and lead to its biggest city, like sunbeams radiating out of a single sun. Instead, *Beersheba Metropolis* opted for the spider's web approach, which conveys a different message. In my humble opinion, this option is more suitable for the idea of developing the region than the sun-based option.

However, having said this, the next question is: is an improved transportation network sufficient in and of itself to encourage regional development? The *Beersheba Metropolis* planners think that it is; they state, "transportation should drive development and not just underpin it" (p. 99); their outlook runs counter to "planning approaches that view the transportation setup as a secondary system that has come about in the wake of urban development" (ibid). It is questionable, however, whether it really is sufficient: given the current state of affairs, in which most of the region's population have low incomes, in the absence of a sufficiently broad local stratum of entrepreneurs and persons with capital, with the main manufacturing activities taking place in the area being controlled from outside and targeting markets outside, and a quarter of the area's population excluded from or on the fringes of its economic and cultural activities, I seriously doubt that an improved transportation network will be enough to pull the area up by its bootstraps. A transportation spider's web can only move the Negev forward if it goes hand in hand with massive investments in the economy of the Negev and efforts to raise educational, employment and income levels.

In fact, the *Beersheba Metropolis* planners are well aware of the limitations of their outline plan: as they put it, "the district-level planning toolbox will not be enough to devise a comprehensive development plan for the Beersheba metropolitan area" (p. 55). As a result, they include a separate chapter on development in their report (Chapter 6). They also note an initiative to set up a forum of heads and engineers from

local authorities, whose remit will be to focus on development (p. 98). However, in all matters relating to economic development, the ideas advanced by the *Beersheba Metropolis* team are no more than non-binding recommendations.

Finally, it is interesting to underscore the striking similarity between the public cost of implementing the *Beersheba Metropolis* development plan and that of *Negev 2015*. The *Beersheba Metropolis* team calculated that the investment needed to develop the metropolis over the next two decades would be \$21.5 billion (in today's values, close to NIS 100 billion). Of this amount, \$14 billion is supposed to come from investments by households in housing, and another three billion dollars from investments by the business sector, primarily manufacturing. The balance, totaling some \$4.25 billion, is to come from public funds (*Beersheba Metropolis*, p. 100, Figure 1). In current values, this is equivalent to some NIS 19 billion. It will be remembered that the amount given by the *Negev 2015* planners for implementing their proposal was NIS 17 billion over a period of ten years. It appears that this is the most that the government is willing to spend on the Negev.

Beersheba Metropolis and the Bedouin

Beersheba Metropolis devotes considerable attention to the Negev Bedouin. This can be seen from the list of the project's objectives, including that of "regularizing Bedouin settlement patterns and fully integrating them into the development of metropolitan housing, services, employment and environmental issues" (*Beersheba Metropolis*: 28). The Bedouin issue is reflected in each of the plan's chapters, and has an entire chapter of its own – Chapter 7. This part of the plan also contains a fairly comprehensive sub-chapter containing far-reaching recommendations for promoting Bedouin education.

However, *Beersheba Metropolis*, like *Negev 2015*, does not come to grips with the key issue relating to the Bedouin community in the Negev: the land issue. The planners note in the development chapter that “a primary ‘flagship project’ relating to massive public investment to regularize Bedouin settlement patterns in the Negev should be added” (emphasis in the original) (*Beersheba Metropolis*: 102). It is no secret that there is an unresolved land ownership dispute between the Bedouin and the State of Israel, with the Bedouin claiming ownership over land totaling approximately 650,000 dunams. The land issue is holding up not only regularization of the “unrecognized” Bedouin localities, but also the development and expansion of the recognized ones. Although solutions to the problem are not particularly complicated, and the State itself has already taken major steps toward the same, in the framework of a “beyond-the-letter-of-the-law” recognition of the legitimacy of the claims, and has also proposed a compensation mechanism (Swirski and Hasson, 2005: 9-10), the matter has been postponed time and time again. This may be a result of the fear that a generous policy toward the Negev Bedouin will resurface the issue of lands expropriated from Arabs elsewhere in Israel.

In practical terms, *Beersheba Metropolis* suggests expanding the areas of jurisdiction of the recognized Bedouin localities by the following percentages; Rahat – 63%, Laqye – 72%, Tel Sheva – 80%, Segev Shalom – 25%, Kuseife – 48%; and Hora and Ar’ara, a smaller increase (*Beersheba Metropolis*: 119). In addition, the outline plan includes nine new planned localities: Amm Batin, Tarabin al-Sana, Abu Krinat, Qasr as-Sirr, Bir Haddaj, Makchul, Drayjat, Molada and al Sayyed (all as per the resolutions of the Ehud Barak and Ariel Sharon governments; see Swirski and Hasson, 2005: 27-29). In the wake of the ACRI petition, the localities of Abu Tlul and Al-Furah were added to this list (*Beersheba Metropolis*: 119).

Finally, the plan proposes introducing a mechanism that will enable other villages to be recognized (p. 120). Overall, the planners believe that the new planned localities will provide a response to between 80% and 90% of the residents of the “unrecognized” localities (p. 116). As for the rest, they refer to the possibility of “planning extra localities or separate neighborhoods in the vicinity of the existing localities” (p. 111). Furthermore, the planners indicate that “the working assumption of the planning team is the regularization of the entire population living in permanent localities by the plan’s target date, 2020” (p. 117).

However, there is a fly in this particular ointment: at the end of this material, the planners write that “the entire process described above is subject to the land settlement being speeded up and moved forward, both with regard to the existing localities and in the areas to be designated for new villages” (*Beersheba Metropolis*: 120). Given the profound differences between the Bedouin community and the government concerning land settlement, this means, in effect, that all those good intentions will be put on ice.

The significance of *Beersheba Metropolis* for the Bedouin can also be seen from the analyses written by organizations representing the Bedouin, in either the planning or legal systems.

The *Bimkom - Planners for Planning Rights* association argues that even though “there is no doubt about the sincere intention on the part of the authors of the plan to provide a planning response to the unrecognized villages,” nevertheless *Beersheba Metropolis* “does not meet its goals, ignores the existing situation on the ground, proposes ambiguous planning solutions whereby it is not clear and not certain that these can be implemented, and above all maintains a planning policy that is intended to concentrate the population into a small number of localities” (Bimkom, 2005: 4).

The Bimkom planners argue, for example, that although the authorities have agreed to allow the Bedouin to pursue a rural lifestyle, *Beersheba Metropolis* caps the percentage of persons that are to reside in rural localities at six per cent. At present, the proportion of persons residing in rural localities is higher than this figure – without even counting the non-Jewish rural population (Bimkom, 2005: 5).

Another example cited by Bimkom: *Beersheba Metropolis* defines a designated geographical area as a “search space” for the establishment of new Bedouin localities, pursuant to the principle of proposing a range of settlement patterns and the principle of potential recognition for “unrecognized” Bedouin localities. However, there is another fly in the ointment: first of all, the “search space” is defined such that it leaves out most of the “unrecognized” villages (Bimkom, 2005: 6), and secondly, instead of the “search space” being earmarked for habitation by the Bedouin only, the plan also allows for Jewish settlement – “something which runs counter to all reasonable planning logic and ignores the reality on the ground. In the southern district, there are numerous alternatives for Jewish population settlement, alternatives that according to any criterion are preferable to setting up new (Jewish) localities” (ibid.).

Bimkom planners go on to argue that the areas earmarked for new Bedouin localities are, for various reasons, located in the vicinity of a number of the recognized Bedouin townships, giving rise to the suspicion that despite the fact that on the face of it, these are to be new, independent localities, the intention is ultimately to increase the density of existing townships (p. 10). Finally, under *Beersheba Metropolis*, apparently some of the “unrecognized” Bedouin localities will not be able to request recognition, either because their location is defined by the plan as a “desert landscape area,” or because it is designated as an area for the establishment

of regional or national-level infrastructure, or for industrial development (pp. 10-11).

The Association of Civil Rights in Israel, whose petition to the High Court ultimately led to Amendment 23 to DOP 4/14, also argues that *Beersheba Metropolis* “does not provide an equal and reasonable planning response to the population of the unrecognized villages and continues a discriminatory and unreasonable policy against them” (Shughry-Badarne, November 26, 2006: 4).

Finally, let us note the position of Adalah, the Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights, on the *Negev 2015* plan: “The plan neglects the Arab population, invests heavily in developing Jewish localities and the Jewish population, and is designed to attract a particularly strong Jewish population, and thereby increases the socio-economic and spatial gap between the two populations ... in the Negev.” (Hamdan, 2006)

The National Security Council Position Paper

In January 2006, Israel’s National Security Council (NSC) presented a series of recommendations concerning the Negev Bedouin. The fact that the NSC considered it appropriate to draw up a document on the Negev Bedouin, and the fact that this document was considered worthy of presentation at the Herzliya Conference on Israel’s national security, indicates that the Bedouin continue to be viewed as a “security issue” – to the same extent at least as they are viewed as a “socio-economic issue.”

It should be noted that the NSC drew up its paper not long after the implementation of the Gaza disengagement plan, and this fact is very evident from the spirit of its recommendations.

Unlike *Negev 2015*, the NSC recommendations do not constitute a

“plan.” Moreover, the recommendations do not apply to the entire Negev, but only to the Bedouin who live there. We have nevertheless chosen to relate to the NSC paper in the framework of the present document, in light of the fact that the Bedouin constitute around a quarter of the Negev’s population, as well as the fact that both *Beersheba Metropolis* and *Negev 2015* devote extensive chapters to the Bedouin population of the Negev.

The NSC paper is tantamount to a call to the government to establish a mechanism for the implementation of existing Cabinet resolutions, and specifically, a series of three resolutions on the issue of the Negev Bedouin, adopted in 2003 by the Israeli government under Ariel Sharon. The first resolution in this series (Resolution 881, dated September 25, 2003) is actually a ratification of a decision taken when Ehud Barak was in power (Arab/43, dated November 30, 2000) about recognizing a number of the “unrecognized” Bedouin localities in the Negev (the Sharon administration decided to accord recognition to seven additional localities. At the same meeting the Sharon administration instituted a multi-year plan intended to cover the 2003-2008 period, at a cost of NIS 1.1 billion (see Swirski and Hasson, 2005: 25). A considerable portion of this amount was earmarked for the budgets of bodies responsible for policing the Bedouin, such as the State Prosecutor’s Office, the Green Patrol and the Ministry of Internal Security.

Three months after Resolution 881, two follow-up resolutions were passed (Resolution 2886 of December 12, 2004, and Resolution 2959 of December 23, 2004). The latter were intended to enumerate the steps the government would take in order to implement the policing element of Resolution 881. The principle behind the two resolutions was the establishment of an inter-ministerial board to coordinate land-law enforcement measures. This board was to be set up in the

framework of the Israel Police and would be headed by a senior police officer. The board was to coordinate the operations of the various state-level bodies already involved in this field, including, for example, the Green Patrol. In addition, the resolutions called for the setting up of two new specialized bodies whose purpose was to deal with enforcement of land laws: a specialized police unit, with 108 officers; and a special department in the State Prosecutor’s Office, with 10 budgeted posts, including six budgeted posts for counsels. The Regional Council for Unrecognized Negev Villages viewed the Sharon plan as “a declaration of war on the Bedouin community in the unrecognized villages” (Swirski and Hasson, 2005: 29).

The NSC recommendations “were intended to strengthen the policy line pursued since 2003” (NSC: 10). In this framework, the NSC recommended introducing an enforcement apparatus to operate in the framework of a time limit of five years. Within this time frame, the NSC team recommended that the government act the same way it did over the disengagement issue: “to offer [the inhabitants of the “unrecognized” Bedouin localities] a defined response, time-limited, with a financial incentive to the entire community interested in reaching a solution. When the time limit is up (for example, two years from when the proposal was made), to carry out an intensive operation of evacuating [persons residing in] illegal structures... If the government evacuated 8,000 citizens who were in legal structures, it can also evacuate thousands of citizens living in illegal structures” (NSC: 3).

The NSC adopts a sweeping approach, stating that “the setting up of additional settlement localities should not be rejected out of hand” – i.e., the recognition of “unrecognized” villages in addition to those recognized by the Barak and Sharon governments; in other words, to make it possible for most of the Bedouin to live in recognized localities, situated where they

live today. This is of course a welcome step, but the NSC conditions recognition on a number of prerequisites that are unlikely to be acceptable to the Bedouin. The main condition is the agreement of the Bedouin inhabitants of the localities applying for recognition to a land settlement – an issue over which substantive disagreement exists between the Bedouin and the government, whether the matter is compensation levels or land use. It is difficult to imagine that the Bedouin will agree to a settlement according to the present government offer (see Swirski and Hasson, 2005). This being the case, the possibility of the NSC recommendation being implemented depends to a great extent on the government's willingness to offer the Bedouin a better settlement than that currently before them. True, the NSC is recommending "increasing what is offered in consideration for land compromises," but this is only on condition that there is a "critical mass of people involved," i.e. whole tribes or clans. This is a problematic condition that shifts the burden of reaching a compromise to the various Bedouin communities and relieves the authorities of having to negotiate directly and separately with every single landowner – as is the case for disputes with other groups of citizens. In this context, it should be noted that when the government decided to evacuate the Israeli settlements in the Gaza Strip, it offered generous compensation on an individual or family basis, and did not impose on the settlers the responsibility for reaching compensation agreements among themselves.

The key problem of the NSC recommendations lies in the attempt to place the process within the straitjacket of a set time limit, at the end of which stands the threat of a coerced settlement. In the absence of any reference to the government's willingness to allocate significant sums to a land settlement, it may be assumed in advance that coming to an arrangement that is acceptable to residents is an extremely difficult task, and it is

feared that at the end of the given time frame, a coerced solution is to be imposed.

Interim summary

Thus far we have reviewed two government plans for developing the Negev – the *Beersheba Metropolis* outline plan (DOP 4/14/23), and the National Strategic Plan for the Development of the Negev, the brainchild of the Daroma Association. To these two plans we have added the National Security Council document concerning the Negev Bedouin.

At the time of writing (December 2006), *Negev 2015* was frozen: in the wake of the Second Lebanon War, the government decided to divert funds earmarked for the Negev to the Galilee. The district outline plan for the Beersheba metropolis is going through long-drawn-out approval procedures. As mentioned, the NSC document is not a plan, but rather a call for the implementation of decisions taken by the Sharon administration about how to deal with the Bedouin.

In the meanwhile, things are happening on the ground. On the one hand, broad swathes of land are being earmarked for "individual ranches" for Jewish families, and on the other hand, the Israel Police regularly and repeatedly demolish the homes of Bedouin families, in the absence of a land settlement and in the absence of official recognition for the "unrecognized" Bedouin villages.

We will now consider proposals submitted by non-government bodies that relate specifically to the Negev Bedouin: the plan by the Regional Council for Unrecognized Negev Villages, and the economic development plans submitted by academic researchers.

Alternative Plans: The Regional Council for Unrecognized Negev Villages

In June 1999, the Regional Council for Unrecognized Negev Villages submitted an alternative plan to DOP 4/14. This plan does not deal with the overall development of the Negev; instead, it focuses on the Bedouin population, and, more precisely, on the inhabitants of the “unrecognized” villages. The main objective of the plan, which was drawn up strictly in accordance with planning rules, was to achieve recognition of the existing villages and develop municipal entities that would make it possible to put into practice the right to elect a local government and at the same time guarantee the provision of services to the residents of the villages, as is the standard practice in localities elsewhere in Israel (Regional Council for Unrecognized Negev Villages, 1999: 6). The plan sought to make it possible to build and develop within the boundaries of the localities; to lay down land uses, as well as building rights; to lay down conditions for the detailed planning of the road and highway system; to strengthen the system of existing internal roads and approach roads – all the way up to the development of a planned transportation system; to preserve and foster historical, natural and archeological assets; to determine the size of the localities and the directions of their development, with the goal of assuring quality of life and community living; to bring about conditions for raising the residents’ standard of living and guaranteeing a variety of sources of employment within the boundaries of the planning area; and to develop economic entrepreneurship (p. 7).

Among other things, the plan was based on research carried out by the Znohar Company for the Center for Jewish-Arab Development (Znohar, 1999). The research, based on a sample of “unrecognized” Bedouin villages, examined the economic potential of developing agriculture such a

way that those involved would be able to make a proper living from it. The study identified a number of agricultural activities that could meet this need, including hothouse cultivation, intensive sheep-rearing, and intensive fish farming (Znohar, 1999: pp. 3-4). The prerequisites were the availability of capital and suitable infrastructure, including a regular supply of potable water.

The principles laid down by the Regional Council for Unrecognized Negev Villages should be taken into account by the government in its deliberations on development in general, and on the development of Bedouin localities in particular.

Alternative Plans: Abu-Saad and Lithwick

In recent years, a number of plans for the economic development of the Negev Bedouin have been published. The most comprehensive and thorough proposal for changing the status and standard of living of the Negev Bedouin is the one drawn up by Prof. Ismael Abu-Saad and Prof. Harvey Lithwick (Abu-Saad and Lithwick, 2000). The two scholars proposed a development plan for the seven recognized Bedouin townships, based on integrating the Bedouin into the planning and development system of the entire Negev: integration into the Negev economy, and integration into the planning of the Beersheba Metropolis (for proposals in a similar spirit, see Al-Krenawi, 1999).

The first step proposed by Abu-Saad and Lithwick was to connect the Bedouin to the transportation network of the Negev, from providing the Bedouin localities with access to the Trans-Israel Highway and to the railway, to transforming the Nevatim army base into a civilian airport that would connect the Negev’s economic infrastructure with the global economy and at the same time increase employment

possibilities for the residents of Kuseifeh and A'rara. These proposals fit in with broader plans for the economic development of the entire Negev (Lithwick, Gradus, Razin and Yiftachel, 1997).

In parallel, Abu-Saad and Lithwick proposed establishing and improving a wireless communications infrastructure, so that the Bedouin community could be connected up with the Israeli economy as a whole. At the same time, this would also make it easier for Bedouin women to work from home. The authors also proposed setting up a telephone call routing center in one of the recognized localities.

Regarding education and vocational training, Abu-Saad and Lithwick proposed, inter alia, setting up a technological college in one of the recognized localities, to have branches in the others. In the health sector, they suggested setting up a hospital in one of the recognized localities, to act as a secondary hospital for the Negev area.

In the field of farming, Abu-Saad and Lithwick argued that sheep-rearing using advanced technological means could constitute a respectable source of income and employment. Such farming, which could operate using relatively small areas of land, could generate large quantities of meat, milk and wool products, which could be marketed not only in Israel but also in the West Bank, in Gaza and in the neighboring countries. Moreover, this activity could employ a large number of people, including women, who have traditionally played an important role in livestock rearing (Abu-Saad and Lithwick, 2000: 40).

In the business sphere, the authors suggested examining the possibility of setting up a Bedouin development bank that would give grants to businesses as a way of expanding employment. They also suggested assigning a high national priority classification to the Bedouin localities, making them eligible for a variety of state-financed aid programs. Also suggested:

establishing industrial parks and technological incubators, with an emphasis on modern agriculture, modern approaches to construction, desert gardening, and so on. Lastly, they suggested encouraging the creation of joint commercial-industrial parks for Jewish and Bedouin localities, such as the one currently planned at the Lehavim Junction.

In addition to the Abu-Saad and Lithwick plan, there is also a plan to expand employment among the Negev Bedouin, drawn up by economists Amin Faris and Amer Abu Hani (Faris and Abu Hani, 2005). The authors review all the job areas, identifying for each the potential for expanding employment. This plan was financed and published by the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Employment in conjunction with the Joint Distribution Committee and the Negev Center for a Peace and Development Strategy.

Plans for development of the Negev, whether created by the government or by contracted agencies, like "Daroma Eidan Hanegev," need to pay serious attention to the recommendations of Abu-Saad and Lithwick, as well as those emerging from other academic research, as part and parcel of their own planning efforts.

Alternative Principles for Developing the Negev

The Negev's problems are Israel's problems

The first question that begs to be asked is whether the Negev needs a regional development plan. Or to put it another way, are the problems reviewed in the introduction to this paper – low levels of economic development, education, labor force participation and income from employment – problems that are unique to the Negev? Are these problems whose

solution lies in a plan focusing on the Negev?

Below we will argue that most of these problems are simply a local (but not a unique) expression of the problems of Israeli society as a whole:

1. The first problem is that economic growth is concentrated in the center of the country and among a narrow stratum of Israeli society. The growth recorded in Israel in the last two decades is concentrated in a small number of sectors – primarily hi-tech and financial services, and it takes place in a small part of the country – primarily the Tel Aviv and central areas. Around these foci of growth lies a large “periphery,” with a far slower growth rate. This peripheral area includes the Negev, but also large areas of the Galilee and the central part of Israel. In the periphery, or to be more precise, the peripheries, the level of labor force participation is low, and this is particularly striking among ultra-Orthodox Jews and among Arab women. In the Israeli periphery as a whole, pay levels for most workers, both male and female, are low: approximately two-thirds of all employees in Israel earn NIS 5,000 or less; approximately half of them are paid at a minimum-wage level.

2. The second problem is the lag in infrastructure investment. While the Negev’s infrastructure needs upgrading, overall Israel lacks a modern rail network capable of rapidly transporting workers, students and buyers from one place to another. The central area has a highly developed road and rail infrastructure, but even there rail-road integration is still far from sufficient. In addition, the central area suffers from the absence of an intra-urban rail system. At the same time the northern part of the country – apart from the coastal strip – is no less remote from the center.

3. The third problem is the low performance of the education system. Once again, this is a problem that exists

throughout the country: overall, only about 40% of young people are entitled to a school leaving (matriculation) certificate that meets university entrance requirements, and only about 30% of high school graduates go on to study at university or an academic college.

4. The fourth problem can be defined as a problem of the “shrinking of the strong population.” Overall, Israel has been suffering from this syndrome: since 1967, and all the more so since 1985, when it turned its back on a policy designed to bring all Israelis into the mainstream. Instead, it has embraced a policy of growth focusing on capital-intensive sectors – hi-tech and financial services – and the most highly educated part of the workforce. One of the results of this policy has been the shrinking of the middle class and the expansion of the lower class (see Swirski and Konor-Attias, 2004).

Summing up these four points, we can say that anyone who seeks to come to grips with these problems cannot do so by going to the Negev, drawing a circle around it, and saying: I will deal with this area and this area only. This is because these are problems that exist throughout the whole of the country. What needs to be done is to bring about a profound change in public policies in Israel: the whole country needs investments in a broad range of areas of the economy, and in all parts of the country; a consistent policy of salary increases; a massive upgrading of the educational system; and investments in improving the transportation infrastructure.

It is no secret that this is not the direction being pursued by the present government. For the last two decades, the various governments in power have advocated a neo-liberal economic policy that aspires to reduce government initiative and involvement, and, at the same time, to reduce budgetary expenditures and transfer part of the burden of paying for services such as health, education and housing to the

users of those services. By systematically cutting income taxes on individuals and corporations, successive governments have been reducing the resources available for investment in economic development, in upgrading education and in improving infrastructure. Even when tax revenue increases, as has happened in the last two years, this revenue has been used to cut taxes and/or reduce government debt, instead of for investments. In practice, the only area where large-scale budgets are being invested is on improvements to the transportation infrastructure. Moreover, the private business sector does not contribute all it could to economic development in Israel: not only are its investments concentrated in a small number of high-profit sectors, but also it does not make any effort to invest in the periphery. Recently, it has tended to invest at least as much overseas as in Israel.

The best path to follow in order to bring about significant change in the situation of the Negev population would begin with a profound change in public policy in Israel as a whole. *Negev 2015* proposes a soothing, temporary local ointment: but it does not contain the seeds of genuine change. And even if the plan does manage to attract a certain number of “strong Israelis,” any process of trickling down will take an inordinately long time.

Four principles for alternative plans

In light of all the above, I would like to propose a number of basic principles for alternative plans for developing the Negev:

Public policy with clear-cut objectives:

Even without a unique “regional” development plan, the Negev can be upgraded as the result of a national-level socio-economic policy based on clear-cut objectives, clear deadlines, and clear criteria: for example, an educational policy that sets a goal for 2020 of 80% entitlement to a school-leaving certificate (as France

did, for example, in the 1980s), and 60% studying at institutions of higher learning.

Similarly, additional objectives can be posited, including an increase in workforce participation, an increase in the minimum wage, a decrease in infant mortality for Arab families, and a national pension insurance law.

To this can be added an economic policy that seeks to distribute economic activity more evenly throughout the country.

“Absorbing” the Bedouin

The only group in the Negev that requires a special policy are the Bedouin: first and foremost because up to now, they have been totally excluded from government development plans.

It seems to me that the best model available is the immigrant absorption model: the State needs to absorb the Bedouin, just as in the past it absorbed Jewish immigrants. This means looking after housing, employment, education, health and so on. In the case of the Bedouin, translating this immigrant absorption model into practice means recognizing land ownership, according recognition to the “unrecognized” localities, and setting up a whole array of physical and social infrastructure – on the same level as in the area’s moshavim and development towns.

“Absorbing” the Bedouin means switching over from a policy of exclusion based on suspicion and fear to one of inclusion based on self-confidence and partnership.

Preventing the Negev from becoming the garbage dump of Israel

The scenery of the Negev is unique, and it is in dire need of a clear-cut, tough conservation policy. Geographer Elisha Efrat noted that any space-related industrial or technological issue or any land use that does not suit the authorities in terms of

location is shifted to the northern Negev as a one-off solution to a specific problem. This policy – or policy failure – must be discontinued, so that the Negev will continue to function as a scenic and natural resource for all Israelis.

Planning Beersheba as a two-way metropolis:

Beersheba Metropolis and Negev 2015 view Beersheba first and foremost as a metropolis located on a north-south axis. From this point of view, Beersheba's only external link is with the central part of Israel. However, Beersheba is also located on the road from Egypt to Jordan, and, on a smaller scale, on the road between the southern Hebron Hills and the Gaza Strip. Today, these two areas are in a state of hostilities with Israel, but in the future it is to be hoped that the hostilities will give way to cooperation. Hence now is the time to prepare the infrastructure for the Beersheba metropolis so that it will be able to serve the movement of people and goods along an east-west axis as well as a south-north one. In addition, a development plan based on Beersheba's function as a staging post on an east-west axis carries with it great potential for the Bedouin population of the metropolis.

Appendix: Conflicting Figures on the Bedouin Population

There is no official, accepted figure on the Bedouin population of the Negev. For this reason, the figure for the general population of the Negev is not accurate either. The Central Bureau of Statistics states that "it is difficult to estimate the proportion and all the more so the characteristics of the Bedouin population in the [recognized] settlements as well as the characteristics of the Bedouin who are still outside of the [recognized] settlements (2006: 82). The figure we used – 550,000 persons in the Beersheba district, among them approximately 146,000 Bedouin Arabs, is from the Central Bureau of Statistics (ibid: Table 2.10). For the sake of comparison, the Israel Land Administration states that in 2003 it was serving approximately 150,000 Bedouin, 87,000 of whom resided in recognized localities (Israel Land Administration, 2003). The National Security Council mentioned 160,000 Bedouin (in January 2006), about 100,000 residing in recognized localities and 60,000 in localities that are either "unrecognized" or in the process of receiving recognition (National Security Council, 2006). The *Statistical Annual for the Bedouin in the Negev* for 2004 presents, alongside the estimate of the Central Bureau of Statistics, the figure used by the Council of Unrecognized Negev Villages – 159,000 in 2002 (<http://w3-new.bgu.ac.il/bedouin>).

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