**Placed-Based Philanthropic Institutions and Community Development**

**A philanthropic foundation’s impact promoting community development in urban renewal processes: Comparing two philanthropy-government partnership models in two cities in Israel’s periphery**

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**Abstract** 100-150 words

This article presents case studies from urban renewal and community development processes in two cities in Israel’s geosocial periphery. It compares the working principles, strategies, and results of collaborative projects undertaken by a philanthropic foundation, local authorities, Israel’s Ministry of Construction and Housing, and community representatives, and describes how young, mission-based communities can serve as a resource for community development and urban renewal processes in Israel’s peripheral areas.

The evaluative study that accompanied the project used qualitative data collection methods, including 34 in-depth interviews with key stakeholders, field observations, and analysis of official documents.

The results indicate that to ensure the quality and sustainability of community development and urban renewal initiatives, investments are necessary in the local economic and social infrastructure, as is the creation of a strong and resilient partnership between the philanthropic organization, the governmental authorities, and residents.

Keywords: Philanthropic institutions, community development, urban renewal, intentional communities, young communities, philanthropy-government partnership

**Introduction**

This article examines complex urban renewal and community development processes in a collaborative project conducted by the Shahaf Foundation (a new philanthropic partnership for promoting young intentional communities in Israel), Israel’s Ministry of Construction and Housing (MoCH) Neighborhood Rehabilitation Division, and two local authorities in Israel’s geosocial periphery. This joint initiative was designed to improve the wellbeing of the local residents, as community development is viewed as a primary way to strengthen a community's capabilities and advance residents’ interests.

This article first describes the background of the urban renewal initiative, including the difficulties faced by veteran residents, the entry of the philanthropic organization into the area, and the challenges of building a partnership between a “new philanthropy” and the local government. The article then presents the results of a qualitative evaluative study of the urban development projects that were undertaken collaboratively by the philanthropic foundation and the government in two municipalities. In particular, it examines development of the project’s infrastructure, the foundation’s investment principles and strategies, program implementation, and the program’s results and outputs in terms of the community and personal resources that were made available to the municipality and its residents. The article discusses the contributions of activities undertaken by the philanthropic foundation and the young communities it supports, and outlines the steps necessary to ensure the quality and sustainability of such initiatives.

**Urban Renewal Processes**

In recent years, governments around the world, including in Israel, have undertaken processes of urban renewal to promote national goals and meet the needs of local authorities (Cohen, 2019; Israel State Comptroller, 2016; Yulis & Warhaftig, 2020).[[1]](#footnote-1) The goals and expected outcomes of such urban renewal processes include: expanding available commerce and services, increasing the number of housing units in urban centers, physical renovation and development of old neighborhoods and commercial areas, and improvement of residents’ quality of life (Chan & Lee, 2008; Pérez, Laprise, & Rey, 2018; Taleai, Sliuzas, & Flacke, 2014; Woodcraft & Dixon, 2013).[[2]](#footnote-2)

However, there is evidence that such initiatives may have exclusionary impacts (Aalbers, 2011; August 2014, 2016; Goetz, 2013; Kovács, Wiessner, & Zischner, 2013; Lees, 2014).[[3]](#footnote-3) That is, the nature of the neighborhoods gradually changes as gentrification processes improve the physical infrastructure and middle- and upper-classes populations are encouraged to move into previously poor neighborhoods, often displacing the original residents. Some researchers have noted there is a need for increased involvement of veteran residents and investment by public entities in strengthening community cohesiveness in order to ensure social sustainability during urban renewal processes (Chan & Lee, 2008; Cooperman, 2018; Geva & Rosen, 2016; Jonah & Spivak, 2012). However, a follow-up study on programs that were designed to empower communities and involve them in urban renewal projects in the United Kingdom (Dicks, 2013) raises doubts about the success of such initiatives. The findings indicate that in practice, in order to save money, the authorities do not provide any budget for organizations to implement these goals, and the veteran residents have no means of financing them.

Several entities in Israel have recommended making concerted efforts to address the challenges accelerating urban renewal present and to empower veteran residents (Israel State Comptroller, 2016; Israel Ministry of Construction and Housing, 2017; Urban Renewal Authority, 2016). In 2016, the Israeli government established the Urban Renewal Authority, which, among its other responsibilities, provides professional advice and information to residents’ associations, and publishes a report on the socioeconomic characteristics of the areas targeted for renewal. Other governmental agencies and local authorities are expected to participate in this effort. In response, some local authorities in Israel have established urban renewal divisions that employ social workers and coordinators who prepare reports detailing the socioeconomic traits of the neighborhoods to be developed, empower residents to participate in the planning process, advocate on residents’ behalf, and develop the capabilities of the local communities. However, the social workers and staff of urban renewal divisions are employed by the local authorities, and therefore may face a conflict between addressing the needs of the residents and their commitment to the local authority, which wants the development processes to proceed quickly, without necessarily guaranteeing protection of the residents’ interests (Geva & Rosen, 2016).[[4]](#footnote-4) It has also been recognized that supporting and cooperating with relevant non-profit organizations may be an effective means of achieving the goals of urban renewal projects (Israel State Comptroller, 2016).

**The “New Philanthropy”**

Patterns of philanthropy have changed in recent decades; alongside traditional types of giving, a model of “new philanthropy” has developed. Economic growth has led to the establishment of tens of thousands of new philanthropic foundations (Salamon, 2012; Tobin & Weinberg 2007).[[5]](#footnote-5) The “new philanthropists” include wealthy entrepreneurs who made their fortunes in electronics, high-tech, and other modern industries (Almog-Bar, 2018; Shimoni, 2008).[[6]](#footnote-6) This type of philanthropy is characterized as rational and goal-oriented. The organization is often directly involved in the social enterprises to which it contributes. The projects follow a business management plan, and it is expected that there will be a “return on investment” in terms of social impact and benefits (Payton & Moody, 2008[[7]](#footnote-7); Shimoni, 2008). In general, this model of new philanthropy attempts to identify issues that society has difficulty recognizing, stimulate innovative thinking about them, and respond to these issues quickly and effectively. In this way, they seek to produce a change in the operating patterns of the government and local authorities, which will then create changes among service providers and consumers as well (Almog-Bar & Schmid, 2014).

This type of new philanthropic activity is particularly widespread in the fields of advocacy, human rights, and social change (Kraeger, 2021).[[8]](#footnote-8) This is significant, given the spread of neo-liberal economic policies and the reliance on government funding that characterizes many civic organizations and providers of social services (Shaul Bar Nissim & Schmid, 2019).[[9]](#footnote-9) The involvement of these new philanthropic foundations enables entities that are advocating for social change to achieve greater independence from government funding, and may serve as a counterbalance to the governmental economic policies and bureaucracies that often make it difficult to promote social and civic initiatives (Almog-Bar, 2020; Almog-Bar & Schmid, 2014; Chaves, Stephens, & Galaskiewicz, 2004; Verschuere & De Corte, 2014).[[10]](#footnote-10)

**Cooperative Activities of Philanthropic and Governmental Entities**

Philanthropy represents approximately 0.74% of Israel’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP), compared to approximately 2.1% of the GDP in the United States and 0.73% in the United Kingdom and Canada. Over 50% of the funds for philanthropic activity in Israel comes from governmental resources that are directed to private entities providing social services (Schmid, 2021). Although governmental entities in Israel recognize that philanthropic organizations offer an important resource for initiating meaningful societal changes (Frumkin, 2006)[[11]](#footnote-11) some government officials are apprehensive about the involvement of these philanthropic organizations, whose operational patterns are foreign to them (Hess, 2005).[[12]](#footnote-12)

Given the scarcity of philanthropic resources in the realm of social welfare, in comparison to government resources, collaborations between philanthropic and governmental entities are considered helpful in leveraging professional knowledge and experience and increasing the impact of limited resources (Schmid & Bar Almog, 2016; Schmid & Shaul Bar Nissim, 2015).[[13]](#footnote-13) Involving local authorities in government-philanthropy partnerships may strengthen residents’ trust in the entities operating in their area; this is particularly true for populations from disadvantaged sociodemographic and cultural backgrounds. Such partnerships can also help advance initiatives that address complex or controversial issues in the municipality (Bresler, Gonen, & Alsraiha, 2021).[[14]](#footnote-14)

**Challenges in Government-Philanthropy Relationships**

The encounter between a new philanthropy and governmental entities can lead to a value-based and ideological clash between two different organizational cultures (Schmid & Shaul Bar Nissim, 2015; Almog-Bar & Ajzenstadt 2015).[[15]](#footnote-15) It can also yield opportunities. For example, Goffer (2021)[[16]](#footnote-16) notes that such partnerships can expand the involvement and representation of stakeholders from various cultural backgrounds in democratic processes, which he emphasizes should be based on principles of cooperation, partnership, participation, transparency, accessibility, and discourse.

To ensure that the desired results and social improvements are achieved, and that the partnership survives long term, it is essential to invest in three initial stages of building cross- sectional partnerships (Schmid & Almog-Bar, 2020). The first stage is initiation and scoping, which entails identifying common goals and values and assessing the economic resilience of the partnership. The second stage is creation and formationof cooperative work processes. The third stage involves building, implementation, formalization, and standardization of administrative processes. This includes establishing a formalized set of operational standards, including mechanisms for supervision, communication, and implementation of activities. Viale Pereira et al. (2017)[[17]](#footnote-17) note the importance of using information and communications technology as a means of sharing and integrating information among the cooperating entities.

**Supporting Young Mission-Based Communities in Community Development and Urban Renewal**

 “Young mission-based communities” refers to groups of young adults who have chosen to live together on a long-term basis in municipalities and neighborhoods in Israel’s geosocial periphery. Most members take an active role in community life and work together to bring about social changes and improvements. The personal and social capital and resources that they have access to, individually and as a community, can help advance community development and urban renewal processes (Benish & David, 2018; Koren-Lawrence, 2016; Putnam & Feldstein, 2009; Regev, 2008; Russo-Carmel, Sokolover-Jacobi & Cromer-Nevo, 2019; Shadmi-Wortman, 2009; Woodcraft & Dixon, 2013; Yulis & Warhaftig, 2020). Many of the challenges of urban renewal may be addressed by involving members of these young communities in the process. They can make connections between key stakeholders, and because they live in the area, they are familiar with residents’ needs and resources (Dvir, 2016; Jabelberg & Komemy, 2015; Ohayon, 2013; Rojs, et al., 2020; Shemer, 2013; Thelias, Moore & Fiorco, 2012; Tzafoni, 2012).

**Complexities of Involving Communities in Urban Development Projects**

 The encounter between these communities and other local residents also raises questions and challenges (Shemer, 2008; Thelias, Moore, & Fiorco, 2012; Tzafoni, 2012). Veteran residents of a previously homogenous municipality or neighborhood may feel threatened by the entry of members of a socioeconomic group that have moved in from elsewhere, and who differ from them socially and otherwise. In general, members of young mission-based communities are perceived as idealistic and enterprising, in comparison to veteran residents who tend to be more passive and who do not live in a peripheral region by choice. Research on intentional communities in Barcelona, Spain, and Zurich, Switzerland found that members who make ongoing efforts in projects that are not ultimately successful may experience frustration and gradually withdraw from social contact with veterans (Rojs, Hawlina, Gračner & Ramšak, 2020). The professional capabilities of members of young communities need to be reinforced to enable them to effectively utilize their resources.

**The Shahaf Foundation: A Philanthropic Partnership that Supports Young Mission-based Communities**

The current study examined the work of the Shahaf Foundation for Cooperative Community Development. Established in 2010, Shahaf is a philanthropic partnership of foundations, organizations, and private donors who have joined forces to work towards reducing inequalities in Israeli society. This is done through supporting the work and mobilizing the resources of young mission-based communities in Israel’s geosocial periphery. Their work in urban renewal and community development projects is conducted in cooperation with partners in local government authorities and national government ministries. For example, the Shahaf Foundation recruited support from Israel’s Ministry of Construction and Housing and the local authorities, two of the stakeholders with the most significant organizational and economic resources, enabling them to influence the success of the initiative. Virtually no similar activities in this field are being undertaken by other entities.

This study examines the Shahaf Foundation’s support of the activities of young mission-based communities involved in urban renewal and community development in two municipalities in Israel’s geosocial periphery – Beit Shemesh and Lod. The projects took place in neighborhoods in these two municipalities where residents face economic difficulties and where the buildings and common spaces are in a state of neglect. The study was conducted as part of a joint venture between the MoCH Neighborhood Rehabilitation Division and the Shahaf Foundation, which joined forces to support and strengthen the populations in two selected municipalities in Israel’s geosocial periphery. The goal of the venture is to promote community development and increase the involvement of residents in urban renewal processes taking place in their neighborhoods. This article is based on three research reports that were submitted to the Shahaf Foundation and the MoCH at the end of 2020 and in January 2021.

**Materials and Methods**

The study was conducted during 2020. At each of the two selected project sites, the study examined:

* the context in which the philanthropic foundation and the young communities are operating;
* the main activities of representatives of the foundation, the MoCH, the local authorities, entrepreneurs and developers involved in the neighborhood renovations projects, and veteran residents;
* the results and outputs of the project activities.

Accessing a variety of information sources contributes to confirmation and verification of the findings (Stake, 2013). Therefore, a variety of qualitative methods were used to gather data from the field: in-depth interviews, field observations, guided tours of the project sites, and analysis of official documents. In order to examine the issues from multiple perspectives, in-depth interviews were conducted with multiple stakeholders involved in the urban renewal processes in the two selected municipalities. The interviews were conducted face-to-face or via Zoom if health regulations due to the coronavirus pandemic did not allow for personal meetings.

The interviewees included: officials in the local authorities (n = 6), representatives of the young communities (n = 8), neighborhood program coordinators (n = 3), representatives of veteran residents (n = 8), representatives of the philanthropic foundation (n = 4), representatives/officials in the MoCH (n = 2), and representatives of the developers involved in neighborhood renovation and construction (n = 3).

In addition, the chief researcher conducted observations of community activities and meetings with the local authorities, and was taken on guided tours of both sites, to become familiar with the physical infrastructure of the neighborhoods and to hold conversations with residents.

During the project, data were collected on various aspects of the main activities of the joint initiative including: patterns of communication and cooperative activity among the partners (MoCH, local authorities, veteran residents, the young mission-based communities, entrepreneurs, and developers, third-sector organizations, and more); resource allocation and utilization; community development and urban renewal processes; implementation of the project; and use of community resources. After the project was completed, the study assessed results of the community development and urban renewal activities at both sites, and the sustainability and long-term impact of the economic and human resources that had been invested at both sites.

Extensive documentation and written material regarding one of the municipalities was obtained from the Shahaf Foundation, the neighborhood program coordinator, welfare departments, the local authority, the local department of urban renewal and neighborhood rehabilitation, and the developers. These documents pertained to the urban renewal plan, the site, social profiles of the population in the municipality and in the neighborhood slated for renewal, and documentation of meetings and activities, including ongoing activity reports. Less documentation was collected from the second municipality, because there was virtually no documentation of the activities of the municipality, the project coordinator, or the developers. All of the collected information pertains to the project's activities during the years 2018–2020.

**Case Studies**

Examining the two cases of the Beit Shemesh and Lod sites allows for in-depth analysis and comparison of the program’s distinctive operational contexts, the complexities of implementation, operating strategies, and the results of the projects. Analysis of the social and municipal contexts of these two sites enables better understanding of the operation and implementation of the initiatives (Stake, 2013).[[18]](#footnote-18) Both municipalities are located in Israel’s geographic center but its social periphery, as both are ranked as being in low socioeconomic groupings (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2021).[[19]](#footnote-19) A significant proportion of the residents in both municipalities have low socioeconomic status and need the assistance of public services. The information presented in the following case studies is based on the submitted research reports (Lifshitz, 2020).

Table 1: Main characteristics of the local authorities, 2020 (CBS, 2021; NII, 2021)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Beit Shemesh** | **Lod** |
| Socioeconomic cluster | 2 | 4 |
| Number of residents (thousands) | 140 | 82 |
| Area (dunams, in thousands) | 37 | 12 |
| Population density (per capita/sq.m.) | 3,622 | 6,786 |
| % Ultra-Orthodox population  | 55 | ~2 |
| % Arab population | - | 31 |
| % Immigrants (1990+) | 16 | 25 |
| % Birth to 18 years old | 55 | 37 |
| % 65+ years old | 5 | 15 |
| % Employees earning up to minimum wage | 50 | 41 |

**Case Study 1: Beit Shemesh**

The city of Bet Shemesh is located near Israel’s geographic center, and thus has access to many resources, yet it faces numerous challenges. The municipality covers a relatively large area with a relatively low population density. It is experiencing significant population growth, especially among the ultra-Orthodox Jewish population, which is characterized by a low socioeconomic status. The municipality is at the outset of a process of new construction in its jurisdiction. The population is relatively young, with a low proportion of immigrants, most of them e from wealthy countries (North America) or the former Soviet Union. The city faces a variety of challenges in the areas of education, employment, health, and social welfare. A department for urban renewal was established in the city several months ago, after the study was completed.

The program led by the Shahaf Foundation (hereafter “the program”) took place in a distressed neighborhood in an old section in the northern part of the city. The neighborhood was built in the 1950s and 1960s and mainly consists of buildings with two to four stories. The apartments are small and most of them are rented or publicly owned. A high percentage of this neighborhood’s residents are elderly and/or immigrants, and few social services are available to them in the neighborhood. There are no schools or public buildings that can serve as recreation and cultural centers, very few well-kept public spaces where children and adults can gather, and only one playground.

At the end of 2015, a plan was approved for clearing out the neighborhood complex and reconstructing it. The plan calls for a six-fold increase in the number of housing units. The building plan includes housing for the elderly population, small residential apartments, commercial units, offices, spaces for leisure and recreational activities, and a public elementary school.

**Case Study 2: Lod**

The city of Lod in the Israel’s geographic center is relatively small. It has a high population density, with significantly large numbers of residents who are members of disadvantaged populations, namely the elderly (often with little formal education), Arabs, immigrants from poor (mainly North African) countries, and asylum-seekers from Africa. Lod faces multiple major challenges, particularly in the areas of education, employment, health, and welfare. Approximately four years ago, the municipality established a department of urban renewal.

The program led by the Shahaf Foundation was implemented in a distressed neighborhood in an older section of the city. The neighborhood was built in the 1980s and 1990s and mainly consists of buildings with three to four stories and small apartments. Many of them are rented or publicly owned, and the high turnover of tenants makes it difficult for them to organize, for example, to maintain common areas of the building. The public spaces in the neighborhood are not maintained well and are not used in ways that benefit the residents. There are almost no public parks, leisure and recreation sites, or commercial-business areas.[[20]](#footnote-20)

In 2013, a plan was approved for the evacuation and renovation of three neighborhood complexes in this part of the city. The plan called for an approximately four-fold increase in the number of housing units, expansion of commercial and business areas, and an increase of places for entertainment, leisure, and recreation. Additionally, there are plans for an expanded network of intercity and urban roads and for new bicycle and pedestrian paths (Urban Renewal Authority Reports, 2019, 2020).

The implementation of these plans in both locations should change the nature of the neighborhoods, the style of the renovated and newly constructed buildings, and the services provided to residents. Residents will enjoy a higher-quality atmosphere in the neighborhood, and will benefit from the new infrastructure and services in education and transportation designed to meet their needs. However, the changes will be more relevant to those who own their apartments than to those who rent in the area.

In both localities, residents expressed enthusiasm about the urban renewal process and the opportunity to improve their standard of living. Businesspeople and developers are interested in participating in this process as well. However, they face many challenges. Most residents have a low level of organizational skills. Renters are vulnerable due to their tendency to change residence frequently and their need to find low-rent housing. Residents express concern that the urban renewal projects will change the social composition and family-community nature of their neighborhood. To ensure local residents’ sense of wellbeing during the urban renewal process, there must be a parallel process of community development to expand the set of resources and tools available to residents to advance their own interests.

**Results**

The results of the study shed light on various aspects of the joint initiative undertaken by the Shahaf Foundation and the MoCH’s Neighborhood Rehabilitation Division. One aspect examined was their work in supporting the activities of young mission-based communities in these two locations. Another pertains to the partnerships created between key stakeholders (government, local authority, residents). A third was the results of the joint program between a philanthropic foundation and the government in the realms of community development and urban renewal.

Since the operating model was new and experimental, an evaluative study followed the implementation of the project. This was done to identify the most appropriate means for achieving the goals of the initiative – namely, community development among the residents of these neighborhoods in peripheral areas, and expansion of their involvement in the urban renewal process.

**Creation of an Infrastructure for Implementation of the Program**

***Building a Partnership between the Philanthropic Foundation and the MoCH***

The purpose of the partnership between the philanthropic foundation and the MoCH is to recruit resources on behalf of young mission-based communities involved in the field of urban renewal. In the view of the MoCH, these young communities represent a unique resource to moderate public criticism that has been raised against urban renewal initiatives, increase the community’s social capital, and to expand the involvement of veteran residents in peripheral areas.[[21]](#footnote-21) The reasons behind the philanthropic foundation’s investment in this area include advancing urban renewal in these municipalities and influencing the implementation of initiatives in the geosocial periphery so that they reflect the interests of veteran residents.

As a first step in the development of the partnership, the Shahaf Foundation submitted a bid for a tender with the MoCH. Following this, an agreement was reached with a senior official in the ministry regarding the activities to be carried out in the two municipalities over a period of three to four years. Towards this end, a number of meetings were held between representatives of the foundation and MoCH. However, after about a year, the Ministry’s representatives reduced their level of involvement with the program at both sites. They participated only at major junctions (payment transfer dates and presentation of research reports). For the past two years, leadership of the program has remained solely in the hands of the philanthropic foundation. In both municipalities, leadership in the field has been undertaken by local program coordinators.

***Building a Partnership between the Philanthropic Foundation and the Local Authority***

During the stage of formulating the program, both municipalities focused on community development and promoting urban renewal processes in the neighborhoods. In both places, local forums determined that the project plan would include developing leadership and human resources, supervision of urban renewal processes, organizing social community events, and building partnerships with local authorities. Significant differences were found in terms of the organizational patterns and nature of the partnership between the representatives of the philanthropic foundation and the various entities in the two municipalities.

In Beit Shemesh, there was true collaboration between main stakeholders: the foundation, MoCH, the local authority, representatives of the young community, and neighborhood residents. The program’s operational patterns were designed to improve transparency, increase residents’ involvement, strengthen the public’s trust in the process, and create a sense of community. There was communication between the organizations. A steering committee was established that met monthly and consistently published and distributed summaries afterwards. Efforts were invested in expanding residents’ participation in the planning and implementation stages. An opening conference for the project was held, after which a residents’ committee was established, and they were invited to all meetings of the steering committee and meetings with the local authority and the developers. This operational style enabled the project to recruit resources from the local authority and receive support from its senior officials, which helped to advance the program and to address problems that arose during its implementation.

As a senior official in the municipal authority said:

We established a permanent steering committee that met monthly with all the involved entities from the authorities and from the community. We thought about how we could advance the process together at this stage, by getting the approval of the residents, and by encouraging the developers to work together and to submit detailed plans to the local authorities. Everyone from the local authorities made the effort to find out if there were problems in the field, and to try to help…

In Lod, in contrast, the partnership was mainly with representatives of third-sector organizations. The director of the municipal Urban Renewal Department participated in only one meeting. No cooperative work patterns were established between the participating entities. Following the initial stage of formulating the plan, no regular meetings were held between the partners, with the exception of some targeted meetings to plan community social events. No effort was made to encourage participation of residents at any of the stages of the program’s operation in the neighborhood (See Table 2).

Table 2: Key Steps Taken to Create Cooperation at the Municipal Level, in the two Municipalities

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Steps Taken** | **Beit Shemesh** | **Lod** |
| Program organizer recruited | Community social worker;Member of a young community in the city  | Student from a local student organization that deals primarily with volunteering in the realm of education |
| Participation in meetings to formulate the plan | Representatives of MoCH, municipal departments of welfare and neighborhood renovation, residents, and the philanthropic foundation | Third-sector organizations |
| Involvement of the Urban Renewal Department in formulating the plan | Department was not yet established at time of study | Department director participated only in the first meeting  |
| Definition of project objectives  | Community development andurban development processes for the benefit of residents | Community development andurban development processes for the benefit of residents  |
| Establishment of supervisory forums  | Local steering committee with representatives from the MoCH, local authority, residents, community organizers, and philanthropic foundation | Committee formed to formulate an action plan at the outset of the project, consisting of third-sector organizations in the neighborhood |
| Patterns of work, communication and documentation | Monthly meetings and distribution of meeting summaries to all partners | Meetings at the beginning of the project implementation;updates to the foundation via a monthly email from the project organizer |

**Project Implementation in the Two Municipalities**

The foundation’s activities were undertaken to promote two main objectives in the neighborhoods in which it operates: community development and urban renewal.

**The Philanthropic Foundation's Work in Community Development and Urban Renewal**

Analysis of the foundation’s activities in the realm of community development is based on various measures of implementation of participatory practices, community capacity-building, and empowerment efforts (Matarrita-Cascanet, Lee, & Nam, 2021).

**Operating Model**

The program operating models in the two municipalities differed (Table 3). Project implementation in Beit Shemesh had a strong basis in the municipality, characterized by a professional, transparent, and clear pattern of operation, and strong inter-organizational communication. The operational model was established and implemented by a community that lives in this Beit Shemesh neighborhood. Members of the young community that was supported by the project had been involved in the neighborhood on an ongoing basis for years, holding key roles in the local authorities and carrying out programs in the fields of education, welfare, and sustainability.

The program staff consisted of a community coordinator, a worker from the welfare department, and volunteers. The staff met weekly to plan and coordinate program activities and implementation, and work processes were intensively documented. An experienced community worker provided individualized professional guidance to the project coordinator and a steering committee oversaw the program monthly throughout the years of its operation, providing professional assistance and financial resources.

The project in the Lod neighborhood was organized by a local student organization that provides volunteer-led educational and community activities. This organization receives its funding from various departments in the local authority. It encourages alumni to remain in Lod, many of whom take positions in the local authority or third-sector organizations in the city. The project’s operating model in Lod was less professional than that in Beit Shemesh. There was little documentation, aside from monthly emails of key activities to the representative of the philanthropic foundation. The project coordinator received advice and guidance from the student organization, professionals from the neighborhood, and a representative of the foundation.

Table 4: Measures of Project Activity in Promoting Urban Renewal

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Beit Shemesh 3 years of activity | LodFirst 2 years of activity[[22]](#footnote-22) |
| **Resources for project implementation** |
| Team coordinator | Community activities; work with welfare department, two volunteers | Community activities, five students (one day per week) |
| Budget | Budget designated for community events,from the municipal department for neighborhood rehabilitation  | Budget designated for community events,from the municipal department for neighborhood rehabilitation  |
| **Operational style** |
| Networking with officials from the local authority  | Mayor; Department of Urban Renewal, Neighborhood Rehabilitation; community workers | Supervisor of neighborhood rehabilitation |
| Networking with other organizations active in the neighborhood |  | Local third-sector organizations in fields of education, community, and welfare |
| Recruiting members of the young community for project activities | Members of the young community (urban kibbutz) | Members of student organization in the city |
| Activity documentation | Summaries of all meetings of the steering committee and meetings between the neighborhood committee, developers, and officials in the local authority | Summary of initial project coordination meetings; Monthly activity reports via email to the foundation |

**Community Development and Urban Renewal Activities**

To empower a community and strengthen its capabilities, it is important to “bridge” and “bond” social capital (Putnam, 2000; Woodcraft, Bacon, Caistor-Arendar, & Hackett, 2012).[[23]](#footnote-23) Bonding social capital (of partnerships among residents) creates meaning and a sense of belonging and commitment to the community. Bridging social capital (of partnerships between community members and government agencies, local authorities, third-sector organizations, businesses, and developers) increases trust, acceptance, and tolerance among them. For both bridging and bonding social capital, an infrastructure must be established to enable long-term investment in partnerships between residents and other key stakeholders in the community. Mechanisms must be created so the process is not *for* residents but rather *with* residents’ participation, which is encouraged via a variety of means in various stages and areas of the project’s operation.

Table 5 compares the project’s community development and urban renewal activities at the two sites. In the Beit Shemesh neighborhood, emphasis was on community development activities with a participatory, inclusive orientation. Prior to the project’s implementation, the coordinator arranged visits to residents’ homes to familiarize herself with their distinctive social traits and needs.

 G’s [the neighborhood coordinator’s] visits to residents’ homes, interviews, and work on the community level and with a personal and family-oriented atmosphere, were meaningful and made the activities visible to residents of the neighborhood. (Senior official in the Beit Shemesh local authority)

There was a knock on a door in the neighborhood and G. [the neighborhood coordinator] came with a gift, and sat and talked to everyone. (Neighborhood committee member)

These visits were meaningful to residents, and strengthened their trust in the coordinator and allowed them to get to know each other.

A WhatsApp group was created for the neighborhood. A neighborhood committee was established, and they received professional guidance and support throughout the process. Committee members took on various roles in the areas of community development and urban renewal, for example organizing social events for residents (especially during holidays). Committee members were present at all meetings regarding the project.

The neighborhood committee and the project coordinator met regularly for updates on the urban renewal project, to monitor residents’ needs, and to initiate relevant responses. One member of the neighborhood committee spoke about how cooperative organization of neighborhood activities could be successful (in terms of attendance and relevance to residents’ needs):

The residents received letters about Purim activities, they were updated on the neighborhood WhatsApp group about activities at the community center. This made the residents aware that something was progressing, even a little. That had been lacking before.

Activities organized in the realm of urban development included formal training of the coordinator, professional training by various experts for representatives of the residents’ committee, and meetings and conferences open to all neighborhood residents to transmit information on issues such as exercising their rights and legal aspects during various stages of the urban renewal process. A member of the committee spoke about the contribution of the professional training they received:

After the professional conferences, we better understood what is involved in the process and what is needed in order to do it better, in terms of working with residents, the city government, and the developers. We didn’t have anywhere else to learn this. (Neighborhood committee member)

An ongoing professional dialogue took place between the developers carrying out the neighborhood urban renewal project and people with various positions in the local authorities, including the mayor. Representatives of the residents participated in all meetings. The mayor’s participation brought about a meaningful change in the perception of the residents regarding the urban renewal project:

After the mayor’s visit, there was a change in the residents’ awareness, and they came to sign. There was a change in the residents’ trust in the city government and the developers. They trusted the committee because they saw that things were progressing. They saw the mayor walking around in the neighborhood and saw that they could ask questions and get answers. (Project coordinator)

Following the mayor’s visit, residents were more willing to be involved in activities promoting the urban renewal project. They felt that the mayor was accessible and the residents and their needs were visible to those carrying out the project.

Table 5: Program Activities Promoting Community Development and Urban Renewal

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Beit Shemesh 3 years of activity | LodFirst 2 years of activity |
| Community development activities |
| Interviews with residents to map their needs | 170 personal interviews | Approximately 100 personal interviews |
| Bonding social capital (community building, social cohesion, connections between residents) | Neighborhood WhatsApp group to provide updates on activities  |  |
| Community holiday events | Wide range of community events | Wide range of community events |
| Developing diverse and innovative community leadership  | Neighborhood committee involved as an active partner in all community activities | Isolated meetings with neighborhood representatives  |
| Bridging social capital (between residents, the local authorities, and welfare /aid organizations); strengthening ties between neighborhood representatives and officials in the local authority) | Neighborhood committee participation in all meetings of the local authority that are related to community development |  |
| Translation of materials to be distributed to neighborhood residents | Materials were translated into Amharic and Russian |  |
| Urban renewal activities |
| Bridging social capital: strengthening ties between neighborhood representatives and officials in the local authority | Neighborhood committee participation in all meetings of the local authority on the progress of the evacuation-renovation of the neighborhood |  |
| Professional training and guidance for program coordinator | Weekly mentoring by a community social worker; participation in a course on urban renewal  |  |
| Training and guidance for project staff and neighborhood committee  | Four meetings with experts in various areas related to urban renewal |  |
| Expansion of knowledge in the fields of urban renewal, evacuation-renovation process, National Outline Plan 38;[[24]](#footnote-24) conferences on exercising rights | Two conferences on subjects of urban renewal and residents’ rights |  |
| Ongoing professional dialogue with developers | Six meetings |  |

Community development was emphasized in the project in Lod, but the style differed from that in Beit Shemesh. In Lod, there were community activities for the holidays, and a workshop led by student volunteers was offered to mothers at a local nursery school. There were activities to improve the atmosphere in the neighborhood, with “makeovers” such as renovating statues, plastering stairwells, cleaning yards, and establishing a community garden. Neighborhood residents were invited to all activities.

**Products and Outcomes**

Comparison of the program outcomes at both sites approximately four years after the start of the activities reveals a number of significant differences. In the Beit Shemesh neighborhood, where significant investment was made in bridging social capital, the neighborhood committee is still active in planning and offering events to strengthen community cohesiveness (announced through the WhatsApp group). In the words of a member of the neighborhood committee who is responsible for social events said:

On Tu b’Shevat (a Jewish holiday) many residents came. About 50 people came, which was unexpected. For Purim I had a smaller budget [details of budget…] from the developers. We went and asked them, and they gave us a budget… we also organized activities for elderly residents who feel alone and in need of help. Especially during the time of the Coronavirus, it was important for them to get out of the house, meet with people, see that people care about them. It was very important.

This committee member took responsibility to secure a budget for community social events, identify residents’ needs, and plan future activities along with sources of funding for them. In Beit Shemesh, there are ongoing activities to promote the neighborhood urban renewal project with the local authority, the developers, and the residents. A local coalition was created (of residents, the project coordinator and team, officials in the local authority, including the mayor) to advance the project and its implementation in the neighborhood. One of the members of the committee spoke about the joint work of the committee with the foundation’s team, the local authorities, and the developers:

This week, there was a meeting with the mayor. We [the committee] had a meeting beforehand to identify any problems that might arise. The meeting [with the mayor] was called after several decisions had been made without our participation. We wanted to raise issues such as the removal of several roadways from the plan. We asked why this was done, and received satisfactory answers… in the meantime they [the developers] are keeping to the promised time schedule, despite corona, and we are not giving them more time… we also identified a problem with the division of the complexes.

The committee member noted that they held a preliminary meeting prior to their participation in a meeting with the mayor and the developers. This was part of the committee’s monitoring of the evacuation-renovation process. The project in Beit Shemesh was implemented on the basis of a model of first constructing new buildings and only afterwards evacuating people from their old homes, enabling residents to stay in their homes until the new apartments were ready.[[25]](#footnote-25) The neighborhood committee maintained an ongoing dialogue with all the relevant entities (developers, officials in the local authority) and committee members stated that they were personally involved in the renewal process. However, some officials in the local authority stated that it is a waste of resources to invest in community development while the renovation process is progressing and residents are waiting to move into their new apartments.

In Lod, the emphasis was on mapping residents’ needs, and offering social community events and activities to improve the neighborhood atmosphere, but there was no investment in developing the community’s resources. During the third year of the project, the coordinator left and another was not appointed for almost a year (due to the Coronavirus, among other reasons). During this time, community activities ceased and neighborhood improvement initiatives were neglected, although renovation did progress on two or three buildings in the neighborhood. The urban renewal process that was scheduled to be finished by the end of 2021 only provided tenants with a “security room” for the buildings and an elevator (despite the small size of the apartments). It is not expected that the construction-evacuation project in this neighborhood will increase the number of housing units, meet construction regulations regarding earthquake safety, or improve the public spaces inside and outside the buildings, despite their state of neglect and dilapidation. Residents repeatedly stated that “Nothing remains from what had been accomplished in previous years.” Unfortunately, due to the cessation of project activity for almost a year, no results of previous work remain visible in the Lod neighborhood; it seems that the invested resources were wasted, and the new coordinator must essentially start from scratch.

**Discussion**

As part of the 21st century trends towards privatization and efforts to strengthen civic society and promote social change, it has become more common for multiple stakeholders to be involved in the implementation of public policy. Meetings and cooperative activity of stakeholders from multiple sectors enable various populations to have their interests represented. Partnerships between philanthropic foundations and governments (national and local) offer opportunities to pool economic resources and professional knowledge and experience for the benefit of the public (Sher-Hadar et al., 2021). More initiatives in this field have recently been launched.

This article analyzed the activities of a philanthropic foundation that supports mission-based young communities as a means of working with other key stakeholders (national government, local authority and residents) to promote community development and urban renewal. It compared the implementation process and the results of community building initiatives undertaken in two municipalities where urban renewal was taking place.

**Contributions of the Philanthropic Foundation and the Young Mission-based Communities**

The results of the study indicate that in Beit Shemesh, the resources invested by the philanthropic foundation in working with the young communities successfully brought about a new spirit to the urban renewal processes by developing local leadership, offering training and guidance, providing veteran residents with professional knowledge, and strengthening community cohesiveness. Representatives in the local authority became aware of the importance of the involvement of these communities as partners. Government funds for the initiative were secured. In contrast, in Lod these aspects were only partially implemented. This indicates that the foundation’s involvement was not sufficient to guarantee that critical aspects of community development would indeed take place.

The philanthropic foundation’s implementation strategy for this initiative influenced the quality of the operation and its results. The case studies indicate three key factors that affected the degree of success of the projects: 1) building a broad partnership between representatives of the foundation, the government (local and national) and the residents; 2) cultivating local community resources; 3) investment in the quality of the leadership and project staff.

**Importance of the Philanthropy-Government-Local Authority Partnership**

In both case studies, the strategy adopted by the philanthropic foundation was to provide leadership for the implementation processes in collaboration with the local authorities. In the municipality where there was successful collaborative work in the field between the local authority, the national government, and the philanthropic foundation (such as pooling of resources and regular monitoring of the quality and pace of the operation) (Casey, 2008), the implementation of the initiative was more successful and had longer-term sustainability. In the locality where the partnership only involved minimal contact between third-sector organizations and the local authority, there was limited application of resources for the benefit of the program and its goals. Furthermore, the Urban Renewal Department in this municipality did not respond to the plan or to the needs of the neighborhood residents.

Figure 1: Resources of the Philanthropy-Government-Local Authority Partnership

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Foundation’s capital* Promoting an initiative for social change
* Providing professional knowledge and training
* Providing a platform for residents’ voices and strengthening their involvement
* Enabling disadvantaged populations to realize their rights
 | Municipality’s capital* Ability to recruit local resources
* Familiarity with and knowledge of local population
* Integration of the initiative with other social community initiatives
 | Government’s capital* Allocation of broad resources towards a high-quality implementation process
* Involvement of professional governmental departments
* Monitoring of the scope and quality of the implementation
* Agreement regarding the scope of philanthropic foundation’s investment

  |

**Recruiting Resources for Community Development Activities**

Implementation of initiatives does not always succeed in achieving the expected results. The quality of project implementation and its success in achieving the expected results was higher in the municipality where there was investment in bridging social capital, empowering the community, and developing its resources through a broad range of strategies (Putnam, 2000; Woodcraft, Bacon, & Caistor-Arendar, & Hackett, 2012). These strategies include: training and professional guidance of a neighborhood committee; residents’ participation in workshops and professional conferences on issues of urban renewal; representation of residents in the initiation, planning, and implantation of social community activities; strengthening social ties and cohesiveness within the community (such as via a neighborhood WhatsApp group and social community activities); and strengthening residents’ involvement with the local authority, such as having representatives on a steering committee that attends meetings with the local authority and the developers. The findings of the study indicate that it is not self-evident that residents will be represented and able to make their voices heard by the local authority and governmental entities. Effort must be made to develop this aspect as an integral part of the implementation of the initiative.

**The Quality of Project Leadership and Staff**

This study indicates the importance of strategic investment in improving the quality of the project’s leadership and staff, such as by providing formal and informal training for individuals and groups and ongoing professional mentoring. Training leaders and residents also contributes to maintaining the “spirit” of the program, promoting residents’ wellbeing, and creating personal and social capital that will persist even after the project ends.

**Ensuring the Quality and Sustainability of the Initiative**

The trends towards privatization and funding of public initiatives from multiple sources may lead to a lack of clear and stringent oversight mechanisms by professionals and officials in the government and local authorities. Such oversight mechanisms include computerized monitoring and documentation, dialogue, and agreements regarding the scope of the investment to be made by the philanthropic foundation (Pereira et al., 2017). The lack of such oversight mechanisms led to great variability in the implementation of the projects in the two investigated municipalities, which led to differences in the quality of the projects and their results.

In one of the municipalities, the program was suspended following the departure of the project coordinator. Thus, residents did not enjoy any lasting impacts from the individual and social capital and resources that had been invested in the program. Savaya and Spiro (2012) note the importance of recruiting resources and investing them at an early stage in order to ensure the sustainability of social initiatives led by a philanthropic foundation. Thus, in the early stages of this partnership between the Shahaf foundation, the MoCH, and the local authorities, it would have been worthwhile to have conducted formal discussions between these stakeholders and other relevant civic entities in order to ensure that the vast resources invested in the social programs would have a lasting impact.

It is worth noting that the current study was carried out towards the end of three years of program operation. In Beit Shemesh, the budgeted activity was about to end. In Lod, a new coordinator had just begun her work in the position. It is necessary to take a longer view (of 5-8 years) to properly assess the degree to which the project achieved its goals. In order to more fully understand the extent of the contribution of philanthropy-government-local authority partnerships, similar initiatives in other municipalities where the context is different should also be studied.

In conclusion, it seems that the young mission-based communities, whose members are committed to community life and working towards social change, represent a significant resource that may contribute to community development and urban renewal processes for improving the physical infrastructure and social fabric in peripheral areas. However, alongside the contribution made by these communities, there must be long-term investment of resources from the national government, local authorities, and philanthropic foundations. Community members who take on roles in the project must receive professional training and guidance, and should work collaboratively with professionals and officials in the local authority and with veteran residents.

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**appendices (as appropriate)**

**table(s) with caption(s) (on individual pages)**

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22. The table shows only the first two years of the program's activity in Lod. After this, the coordinator resigned, and the project did not operate for a year due to coronavirus restrictions. A member of the young community in Lod was appointed as the new project coordinator, but at the time of the study, she had been in the position only for approximately two months. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
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