

“Making the desert bloom” - Zionism encouraged afforestation and the creation of manmade nature. Car-free forests help to propel a deep shift towards sustainable transportation that Israel needs

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1	<p>Key words</p> <p>Recreation in Israel, leisure, environment filled with serenity and beauty, retreat, landscapes, eco-regions, water streams, woodlands, outdoor activities, Making the Desert Bloom, European customs, forest parks, nature reserves, 1 day back-and-forth trip, picnic, barbequing, field trips, extreme sports, commute 1-2 hours, northern valleys, Sea of Galilee, coast for laid back activities, forest as democratic territory, leisure hiking, cross-country walks, educate young generations, plans for green corridors</p>
2	<p>Introduction</p> <p>The word recreation bundles two components. The site- piece of unsettled land- and the crowds who come to this location with the purpose to enjoy the open natural environment that the site encompasses.</p> <p>This idea of leisure is quiet new in the history of mankind, dating back to the western romanticism era of the 18th century. The habit of going away from your daily domain into the wild nature for leisure could not be explained without the context of urbanization. Suddenly, nature was not perceived as hostile environment filled with lurking dangers. It was rather perceived as a realm of serenity and beauty. Through the processes of becoming the urban nation that mankind is now, the sense of retreat has emerged and placed a new purpose for the natural environments.</p> <p>In this paper I am going to analyze the short history of recreation patterns in Israel and will try to shed light on how the distribution of areas for recreation should perform alongside other issues in urban life and sustainability.</p>
3	<p>What is recreation in Israel?</p> <p>Israel is blessed with pleasant Mediterranean weather and a variety of landscapes and eco-regions spread around a small piece of land. From water streams of the hilly Galilee, through the woodlands along its central mountain range and a vast desert at its south - Israel has a lot to offer for outdoor leisure activities, but that entire inventory was not always part of its landscape. With its motto, “<i>Making the desert bloom</i>”, Zionism encouraged afforestation and the creation of manmade nature. By doing so, Palestine’s landscapes were altered to better fit the European values. In that sense the founding fathers of Israel not only brought the Jewish people to Israel, they also imported European customs and style of rec-</p>

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4	<p>Patterns of recreation in Israel</p> <p>For the purpose of this paper I am going to focus on the prevailing types of recreation in Israel, as I recognize from my own knowledge.</p> <p>Living in one of the world's most compact countries, defines the pattern of a 1-day trip to match both Israel's small scale countryside and its short weekend (Saturday is the only day of rest). In terms of popularity, the Israelis have adopted the recreational habit of a single destination back-and-forth day trip. Most common destinations are forest parks and nature reserves in the center and north of Israel. During the hot summer the Mediterranean beaches and other water sources in the north, such as the Sea of Galilee and a selected few steady streams, are becoming even more popular.</p> <p>During longer holidays, Israelis would prefer a three to four days countryside vacation in a hotel or guesthouse, with only short trips to the actual surrounding. The most popular outdoor activities vary between picnic and barbecuing, half day walks (2-4 km long trails on a fixed path), and 4x4 road trips, which have become increasingly popular since the 1990s.</p> <p>Many other outdoor explorations are offered in Israel, ranging from field trips to extreme sports. Nevertheless, every getaway demonstrates a common nationwide mobility pattern. The vast majority of vacationers will drive 1-2 hours to Israel's recreational spots, located in the northern valleys and along its central mountain ridge and will most likely be stuck in traffic on their way back to Tel Aviv metropolis. This example draws a pattern of "reverse commuting". If during the week, most Israelis travel to work in one major metropolis, along the 7th day of the week, the very same people would carry their families and commute to a rather narrow selection of parks and places of attraction.</p> <p>I wish to divide between two sources: Land and Water; and to describe why they play a different role as generators of recreation.</p> <p>Israel's main bodies of water present a varied and sometimes unique experience. The Mediterranean coastline stretches along almost half of the country's length, serves as the immediate getaway from city life as most cities are 0-12 km away from the shore. The Sea of Galilee is one of Israel's main sources of drinking water. The Dead Sea is a true wonder of nature, and alongside with the Red Sea, at Israel's most southern point, they offer an all year round water site of recreation. Apart from the four bodies of water mentioned above, sources of streaming water in Israel are quite scarce. Most of Israel's creeks are dry and only a handful have a steady flow. Tel Aviv is the only city to enjoy a river stream running</p>

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	<p>through its center.</p> <p>The distinction between coastal environment and water stream environment is important, because they make two different types of retreat. The coastal environment is more related to casual laid back activities, while water streams feature intense eco-systems around them that invite exploration. This kind of swarming environment is what Israelis capture as nature, and thus attractive. This explains the mobility pattern I described. - <i>If it isn't green and wet, it's not an attraction.</i></p> <p>Land based sources of recreation can be categorized into four types: forests, nature reserves, national parks, and metropolitan parks. Forests share the popularity of crowds as they provide vast democratic territories (and vast parking spaces) in which anyone can find his own private spot. Since the forests in Israel only date a few generations back, they also gain their affection from those who grew up alongside with the forested areas.</p> <p>Nature reserves were introduced only during the 1960s-70s defining and protecting areas with significant natural habitat. During the same time a national effort of marking hiking trails came about, positioning Israel at the top ratio of trails per area. These trails are the common way for experiencing the broadness of Israeli nature reserves. By offering a range of paths, from short circular ones for families to full day walks for experienced travelers, and up to a 900 km cross-country walk, leisure hiking is a top recreational preference of the Israeli public.</p> <p>National parks are a relatively new hybrid spots, evolving from forests and reservations. Established during the 1990s, the national parks developed new and existing sites of historic and natural significance. These sites were developed for a clear recreational purpose. While the previous two remain free of charge, national parks have an entrance fee, in order to provide both facilities and cleaning services.</p>
5	<p>Evaluation of recreational activities on the natural habitat</p> <p>Generally speaking, recreation by meaning has two sides. On the positive side, the variety of accessible outdoor activities is a great advantage in modern society and serves as an opportunity to educate young generations about the importance of undisturbed eco-systems. In times when reality is challenged by an augmented substitute, the fact that people still prefer a quick getaway to the open air is something to encourage. Yet, it is hard to say whether the awareness to issues of conservation has increased at all. The more people find the beauty of nature appealing for recreation, the more polluted it becomes. In my opinion, the most common activity is the Mediterranean custom of “<i>settling and lounging</i>”. It</p>

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	<p>involves food and an overflow of related accessories. Hence, <i>“take back what you brought”</i> is far from realization in Israel. Even though the left packages and food trash remain mostly a visual pollution, in some cases the ongoing flow of campers interferes in the environment of the local wildlife.</p> <p>In that sense, national parks are a result of a failed education policy towards conservation. They try to answer to both demands – 1. Areas for recreation, as a provided service; 2. Protection of natural habitats from harmful behavior of vacationers. It can be described as a transfer of the crowds. Will manmade parks be accepted as main alternative? Grandiose plans for more recreation areas might suggest it hasn't. In the last few years we are facing hallucinatory proposals for flooding seasonal streams with treated water to create new river sites in the center of Israel. In the south, the Red Sea-Dead Sea canal has shifted from a paradigm of a pipeline to a series of artificial lakes surrounded by hotel resorts. These kinds of projects completely disregard the importance of the existing eco-systems and pose a threat to primal landscapes.</p> <p>Metropolitan parks seem to solve the dilemma by expanding the distribution of recreational areas to inner circles of main cities. Although only one metropolitan park actually exists, a few more are in planning. These parks have the potential to solve the Gordian knot of recreation and venturing away from the city to a so called “nature”. Defining “green corridors” that lead to these parks and draws new awareness to urban nature is a positive step that Israeli planning authorities started to implement. Such corridors will make the parks accessible from city centers, creating an alternative to the necessity of a private car.</p> <p>To conclude this analysis, Israeli officials who are responsible to supply recreational areas face a difficult challenge. Their complex consumer is a society who is educated on western patterns of Pastoral, lingering for green scenery, with Mediterranean habits. Furthermore, Israeli officials have to create affinity and respect to a native landscape which is mostly bare and sometimes arid. The founded inventory of recreational areas supplies a diverse blend, but perpetuated a national mobility pattern to selected sites, which evolved into environmental hazards. Future plans see the advantages of bringing recreation to metropolis regions themselves. An approach as such sees recreation as yet another urban service that can be managed within its infrastructure, without putting natural habitats under risk.</p>
6	<p>KKL-JNF's sustainable engagement</p> <p>The KKL-JNF functions as Israel's most wide spread environmental institution, with a clear mission to promote ecological values and instill sustainable thinking in all its endeavors.</p>

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	<p>However, all KKL-JNF recreational sites are totally car dependent. This creates a vicious circle with direct consequences; the benefit of a private car allows visitors to pack in more food and packages causing more litter being left behind. Furthermore, cars sometimes cause considerable damage to the forest environment and even safety hazards during weekends and holidays when parks and forests are packed with vacationers' cars. This makes the getaway an unpleasant and even stressful experience. The indirect negative effects of such car dependency are excessive air pollution, congested roads on weekends and holidays, the exclusion of the underprivileged population and those who chose not to own a car for enjoying recreational sites.</p> <p>During the greenXchange seminar we came to the notion that it is time for KKL-JNF to tackle this issue and find innovative solutions for enabling access to recreation sites without private cars. New systems such as city to forest transit network or promoting car-sharing via social networks possess tremendous benefits for both the forest environment and to Israeli communities. In a truly Car-Free Forest (CFF) the visitors will enjoy a quieter and calmer natural environment, with less air pollution and less trash to be handled. A CFF will be make a safer environment for all its inhabitants- both visitors and wildlife- as it can introduce non-motorized means of inter-forest transportation such as a variety of bicycles, electric mini cars etc. Such means will encourage more visitors to explore the forest environment and to appreciate it in new ways. Above all a CFF will help to propel a deep shift towards sustainable transportation that Israel needs, setting KKL-JNF as a pioneer in this field.</p>